

NASH NEXT ARTIST SPOTLIGHT MICHAEL RAY >> VOTE FOR COUNTRY'S HOTTEST BACHELORETTE

NEW LOOK!

# NASH Country Weekly

COUNTRY FOR LIFE | AUGUST 17, 2015

**JAKE OWEN'S**  
"REAL LIFE"  
TAKES HIM . . .  
WAKESURFING

**COLT FORD**  
MAKES THE  
CUT WITH  
WILLIE  
ROBERTSON

**RAELYNN'S**  
MUSIC LIFTS  
THE SPIRITS  
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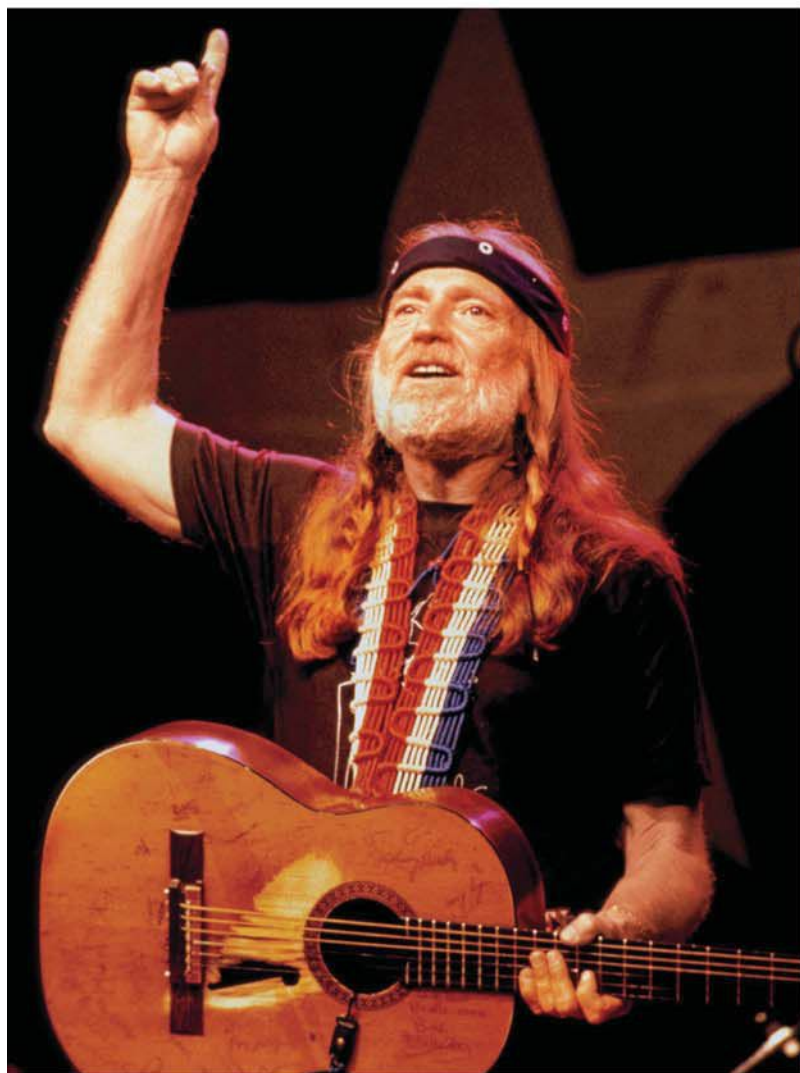
“GONNA WANNA TONIGHT”



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**1988** SATURDAY,  
AUG. 13



## Stardust Memories

Never put anything past the always-unpredictable **WILLIE NELSON**. The Red Headed Stranger loves to meander outside the box, and he flew way out of the confines when he recorded his album of pop standards, *Stardust*, in 1978. The country mainstay delivered his unique take on American Songbook classics like “Blue Skies,” “All of Me” and “Georgia on My Mind,” all produced by R&B great Booker T. Jones. Willie had selected the songs from a list of his childhood favorites.

*Stardust* drew universal acclaim for Willie’s easygoing vocals and its sterling production. It was also a commercial success, hitting No. 1 in June 1978 and earning a platinum designation for sales of 1 million copies later that year. But most remarkable was the album’s longevity. *Stardust* spent two years on the *Billboard* 200 chart, which tracks every genre of music. On Aug. 13, 1988, *Stardust* became the first album in history to mark a whopping 10 years on the *Billboard* Top Country Albums chart. This past year, *Stardust* received an additional honor: induction into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

**2015**

### BI-MART WILLAMETTE COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

**AUG. 14-16:  
OREGON TRAIL**

Make your way to Brownsville, Ore., for one of the last big festivals of the summer season, the Willamette Country Music Festival, Aug. 14-16. Shaking it up in the Pacific Northwest will be **LUKE BRYAN**, **CHRIS YOUNG**, **THE BAND PERRY**, **DUSTIN LYNCH**, **RASCAL FLATTS** and other hot country acts. For more info, visit [willamettecountrymusicfestival.com](http://willamettecountrymusicfestival.com).



**AUG. 15:  
RIDING SHOTGUN**

**TIM MCGRAW** brings his Shotgun Rider Tour to Nashville’s Bridgestone Arena Aug. 15, accompanied by opening acts **BILLY CURRINGTON** and **CHASE BRYANT**.



**AUG. 15:  
TWO SCOOPS OF FUN**

Little Big Town’s resident cooking expert, **KIMBERLY SCHLAPMAN**, gets the scoop on ice cream on the Aug. 15 edition of her popular culinary show, *Kimberly’s Simply Southern*, on the Cooking Channel. Kimberly visits an ice cream parlor in Louisville, Ky., then whips up some sweet treats of her own with **BRETT ELDREDGE**.



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#### LUKE BRYAN

shows his reflective side on his new album, but he's not ready to leave the party just yet.

**PLUS!**

**NASH**  
**NEXT**

**27 MICHAEL RAY** is hotter than a Southern summer with his sizzling lead single, "Kiss You in the Morning," and self-titled debut album. Find out how the Florida native successfully made his way to Music City.



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## FROM THE EDITOR



### Dear Readers,

Are you ready for some more Luke Bryan? Luke is ready to roll out his fifth full-length studio album and he's really excited about it. We were able to get an advance listen, and it's some of Luke's best stuff. Our managing editor, Jon Freeman, sat down with Luke for our cover story to find out what went into the project. Luke also talks about his family, and he even explains where he was coming from when he made his recent comment about the Outlaws. It's a great feature, and Luke is such a great guy. We love when he comes around to chat with us and brighten up our office. So check out our cover story and see what Luke has in store for you.

And it's that time for the guys. You ladies picked Chris Young as the hottest bachelor in country music; now the guys have the chance to pick the hottest bachelorette. We have 20 beautiful ladies to choose from, including a bevy of newcomers who have recently burst onto the country music scene. To vote for your favorite bachelorette, go to *CountryWeekly.com*. (See the ballot on page 36.)

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands Aug. 17.

### SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

LISA KONICKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

## FROM THE READER



*Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think!*

Letters, Nash Country Weekly, 506 2nd. Ave. South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210

**EMAIL:**  
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@countryweekly

Please include your name, address and daytime phone number with all correspondence. Nash Country Weekly assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material, including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork, manuscripts and letters. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

### I WANNA TALK ABOUT ME

What happened to Toby? I just bought the July 6 issue of *Nash Country Weekly*. Disappointed? YES! What happened to highlighting Toby Keith's induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame? It is such

a huge award, and the last two issues had absolutely nothing about Toby's induction. I am sad that this GREAT artist has been overlooked.

**JULIETTE DEMERS**  
Warwick, R.I.

### EDITOR'S REPLY:

Thank you for your letter, Juliette. Rest assured, we did not overlook Toby. I hope you picked up our Aug. 10 issue (on stands July 31) with Toby on the cover. We wrote all about his induction and what it meant to him.

### SOME GIRLS DO

I enjoy reading your magazine. I would love for you to include Sawyer Brown in your magazine sometime. It would be great if you had an article on what they are doing now, but if not that, at least a picture or small article somewhere in the magazine. They have a lot of fans and also have a new single right now that is a great song. Thank you so much!

**MARY MASEK**

### TWITTER

Really enjoyed this feature on @MoPitney in @countryweekly ["Mo Knows," Aug. 3]. No one more deserving than Mo!

**CHRIS BURKMENN**  
@chrisburkmenn

@KickSomeNash @countryweekly @LukeBryanOnline Omg! There's nothing as hot as @LukeBryanOnline dancing. Love love love Luke!

**GINA WHITT**  
@WhittginGina

Hey @countryweekly give @johnberry and his Kickstarter a shout out?

**JOEL M. ANDRE**  
@joelmandre19h

OMG! Are you kidding me? I'm officially dead. Karen [Fairchild] & Miranda [Lambert] onstage at the same time.

**MS WHITNEY**  
@Ms\_\_Whitney12h

### FACEBOOK

I disagree with your cover choice—"Country's Best-Dressed Men" [Aug. 3]. It should have been Trace Adkins!

**DEBBI MERRITT**

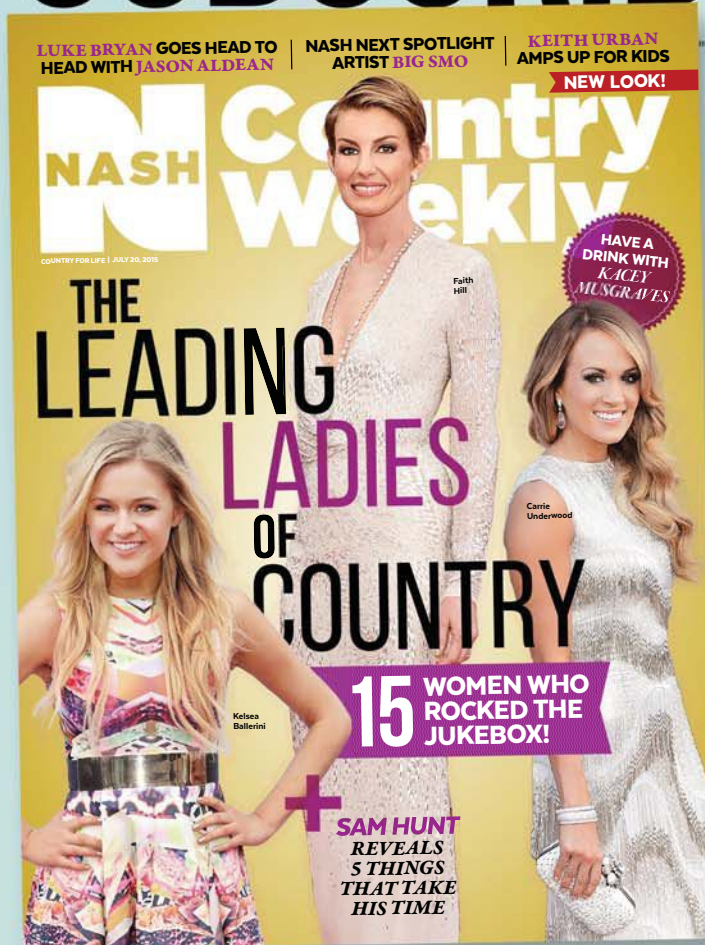
Country Weekly! You got it right!  
**HELLIE PAIVA-DEMARCO**

Sadly Chris Young didn't make the best-dressed list. Not sure why. He always looks so amazing. On a brighter note, he is in this issue for Boots on the Beach ["Shore Leave," Aug. 3]. Thank you.

**KARI KUTTLE**



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**COUNTRY FOR LIFE**



## FIRST TAKE

### COLOR ME RAD

Dolly Parton surprises 7-year-old actress Alyvia Lind on *Today* with the announcement that Alyvia will play a young Dolly in the upcoming movie *Coat of Many Colors*.











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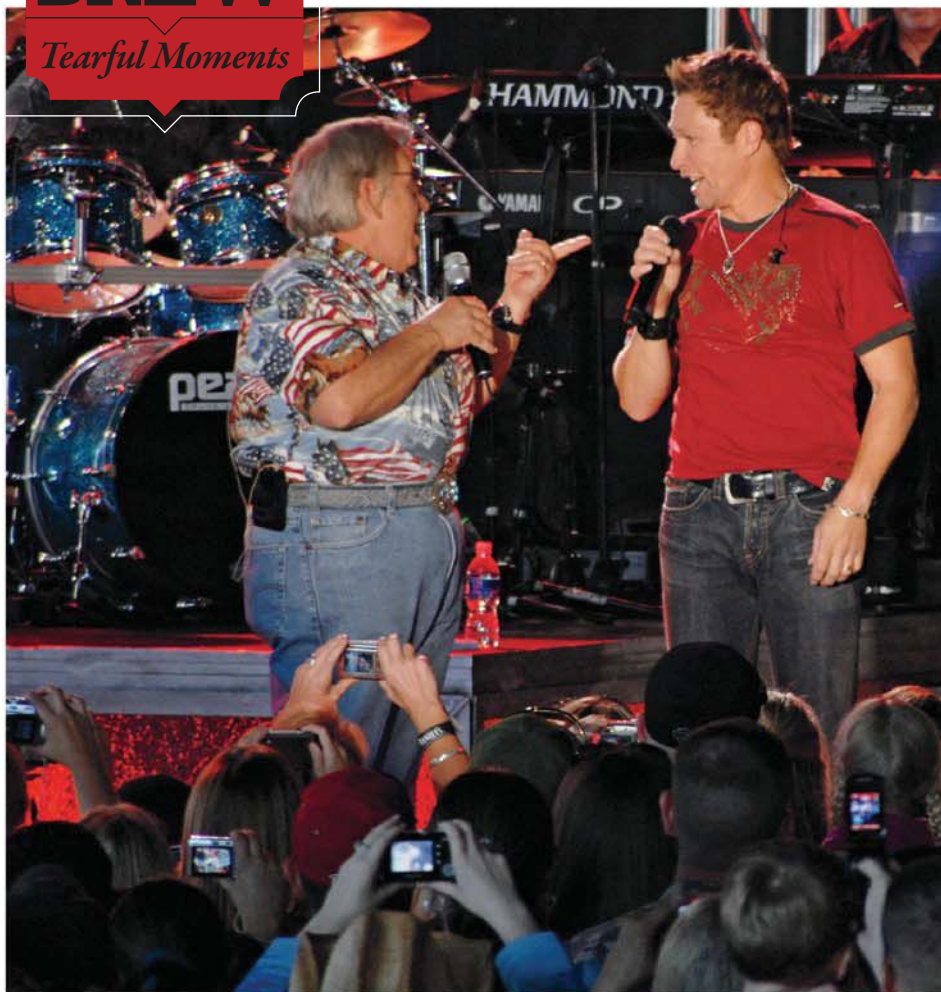
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as part of the Opry's 90th  
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SEPTEMBER 18, 2010

# Bragg Book

**CRAIG MORGAN** was invited to become a member of the Grand Ole Opry during a special concert for U.S. troops at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, N.C. The evening was a homecoming of sorts for the singer, who was stationed at Fort Bragg from 1990 to 1992 during his 10-year active duty tenure in the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division. Opry member John Conlee surprised Craig by walking onstage during Craig's performance of "Rose Colored Glasses," a song John popularized in 1978 and a frequent addition to Craig's set list. John then invited Craig to officially join the Opry on Oct. 25, 2008.



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A SWEET TASTE OF ALL THINGS COUNTRY

*Opening Act*



## SALAD SPINNERS

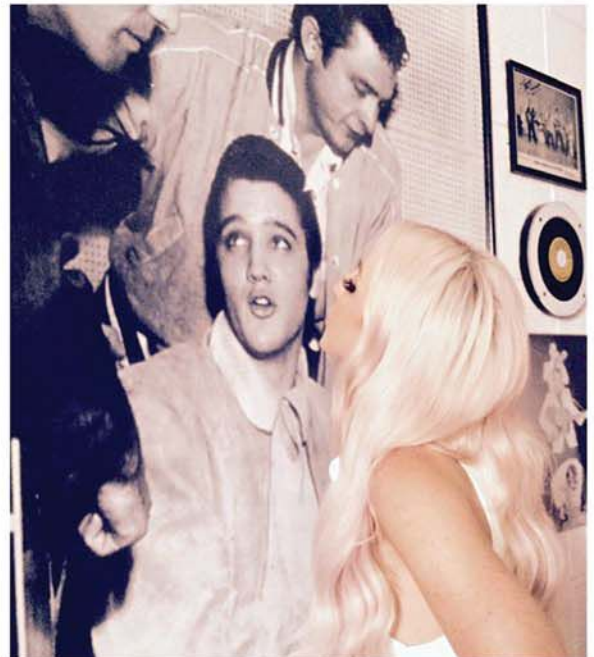
Following in the chicken-fried footsteps of Kix Brooks and Lee Ann Womack, **BRETT ELDREDGE** and **THOMAS RHETT** have teamed up for a couple of Zaxby's commercials. The country crooners banter back and forth and even do a bit of singing in a TV spot for the House Zalad (that's salad to any non-Zaxby's regulars). Check 'em out on [zaxbys.com](http://zaxbys.com), if you're not chicken.

Brett & Thomas by Terry Wyatt/Getty Images





(Above) **ROUND TABLE** (From left) Sheryl Underwood, Sara Gilbert, Hunter Hayes, Sharon Osbourne, Carnie Wilson and Julie Chen tackle the issues of the day on *The Talk*; (below left) **FOUR LEG DRIVE** Lindsay Ell marvels at the police cars in Canada.



(Above) **BURNIN' LOVE** Ashley Monroe is totally married, but 1950s Elvis Presley is hard to resist.

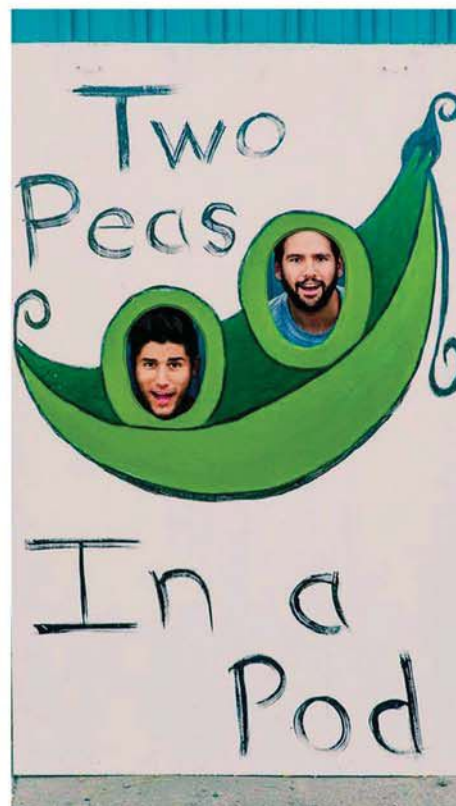




(Above) **GIRLS + COUNTRY SONG** Dierks Bentley brings out his Riser Tour guests Maddie & Tae to sing a little something.



(Clockwise from above) **COOKIE DUSTER** Jimmy Fallon is bewitched by Alan Jackson's mustache; **HYPNOTIZED** Parmalee's Josh McSwain one day hopes to have his own Minions; **VINE AND DINE** Dan + Shay in their resting state of adorable; **INSERT MISTAKE HERE** Channel 4 apparently doesn't even know Carrie Underwood's last (or first) name.



Dierks with Maddie & Tae by Ida Mae Astute/ABC; Josh courtesy Parmalee Instagram; D+Sh courtesy Dan + Shay Facebook; Jimmy & Alan courtesy Alan Jackson Facebook; Mike courtesy Mike Fisher Instagram





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**BACK IN NAMM** (Above) Dustin Lynch performs at the summer gathering for the National Association of Music Merchandisers in Nashville; (right) at the American Eagle Awards, held during the NAMM trade show, Rosanne Cash pays tribute to honoree Kris Kristofferson; (below) Kris receives his honor from Jack Ingram and Rosanne; (bottom left) The Oak Ridge Boys salute longtime manager Jim Halsey.



**WITH THE KING OF BROKEN HEARTS** Jim Lauderdale (left) receives his American Eagle Award





**IN NAMM ONLY** (Below) Dwight Yoakam accepts his American Eagle Award; (left) Braxton Burke is crowned the winner of the World's Fastest Drummer contest; (below left) Vince Gill talks guitars with a NAMM attendees.



**CRUZIN'** Brad Paisley tries out his new Santa Cruz Guitar Company signature guitar at Artisan Guitars in Franklin, Tenn.; (right, from left) SCGC's Carolyn Sills, Artisan's Bill Warmoth, Artisan's Ellie Warmoth, SCGC's Richard Hooker, Brad and SCGC's Ryan Jacobson pose with the new guitar.





# CAPTIVATING QUEBEC

**KEITH URBAN** earned his spot as a country ambassador when he lit up the crowd at the Festival d'été de Quebec in Canada last month. Keith was the first country artist in four decades to play the historic festival, and by all accounts he electrified the stage with his dynamic two-hour show. Keith's performance is significant in the fact that Quebec is a predominantly French-speaking province, and American country music does not always translate well to that particular audience. Country is definitely more popular in the western provinces of Canada, which have produced several country artists over the years, including Terri Clark and Emerson Drive. But it looks like Keith has changed the game a bit. Remarked the Quebec festival's program director, Louis Bellavance, "Thanks to Keith Urban, we'll have country music again for the years to come on our main stage."

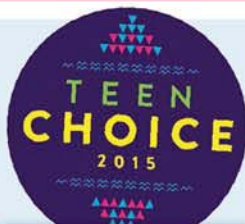


## Girl Crushin' It

In one of the year's more triumphant chart stories, **LITTLE BIG TOWN**'s single "Girl Crush" recently earned a special place in history with its 11th consecutive week at No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Hot Country Songs chart. In doing so, it set the record for the longest No. 1 by a group of at least three members in chart history. Previously, The Browns (which included the late Jim Ed Brown) held the record with "The Three Bells" from 1959. Curiously, "Girl Crush" did not make it to the No. 1 spot on *Billboard*'s Country Airplay chart.

## Teeny Boppers

The nominations for the **2015 TEEN CHOICE AWARDS** have been announced and six acts are up for Choice Country Song, including **LUKE BRYAN** ("KICK THE DUST UP"), **FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE** ("SIPPIN' ON FIRE"), **HUNTER HAYES** ("21"), **CARRIE UNDERWOOD** ("LITTLE TOY GUNS"), **SAM HUNT** ("TAKE YOUR TIME") and **MEGAN & LIZ** ("THAT GHOST"). FGL will look to defend their title, as they won the award in 2014 for "This Is How We Roll," which featured Luke. The Teen Choice Awards air live on FOX at 8 p.m. ET on Aug. 16 from the Galen Center in Los Angeles.



## SELLING THE POSSUM'S SPOT

**GEORGE JONES** sang, *Step right up, come on in, if you'd like to take the grand tour*, and apparently someone did. The nearly 10,000-square-foot home that the Possum shared with wife Nancy has sold for \$1.98 million, according to Nashville newspaper *The Tennessean*. Antebellum columns frame the front of the home, situated in Franklin, Tenn., on 25 acres of land, and the property also includes a seven-car garage, two barns, a guest house, a swimming pool and a pond. No word on where Nancy will make her new home.







## Praising Songwriters

**ROSANNE CASH, MARK JAMES, CRAIG WISEMAN** and **EVEN STEVENS** have been named the newest members of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, an august body that includes such luminaries as Garth Brooks, Harlan Howard, Dolly Parton and Kris Kristofferson. The four will be officially inducted at the 45th Anniversary Songwriters Hall of Fame Gala, Oct. 11, at Music City Center in Nashville.

Rosanne is being honored in the Songwriter/Artist category for her original tunes like “Seven Year Ache,” “Blue Moon With Heartache” and others. Craig Wiseman is best known for co-writing “Live Like You Were Dying” by Tim McGraw, “The Good Stuff” by Kenny Chesney and other hit country singles. Mark James’ songwriting credits include Elvis Presley’s “Suspicious Minds” and one of the most awarded songs of all time, “Always on My Mind,” made famous by Willie Nelson. Even Stevens has enjoyed hits throughout several decades of country music, including Eddie Rabbitt’s “Drivin’ My Life Away” and Conway Twitty’s “Crazy in Love.”

The four new inductees will join the 196 existing members of the prestigious organization.

## OKIES TO MUSKOGEE

The Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame recently announced their class of 2015, and among the inductees are country group **RESTLESS HEART**. Three of



(From left) John Ditttrich, Larry Stewart, Dave Innis, Greg Jennings and Paul Gregg

the band’s members—Paul Gregg, Dave Innis and Greg Jennings—are native Okies, and Greg says, “We’re very proud of our Oklahoma heritage and extremely proud of all the great music and musicians that have come from there.” Coincidentally, the band’s early producers Scott Hendricks and Tim DuBois are also being inducted. Tim was a co-writer on the band’s monster hit “The Bluest Eyes in Texas.” Singer/songwriter Becky Hobbs, who co-wrote Alabama’s “Angels Among Us,” and steel guitarist Smiley Weaver will also be inducted during the ceremony, which takes place Oct. 16 in Muskogee.

## BIRTHDAYS

**AUG. 10, 1949**  
**GENE JOHNSON**  
of Diamond Rio

**AUG. 10, 1973**  
**JENNIFER HANSON**

**AUG. 11, 1946**  
**JOHN CONLEE**

**AUG. 12, 1956**  
**DANNY SHIRLEY**  
of Confederate Railroad

**AUG. 13, 1973**  
**ANDY GRIGGS**

**AUG. 13, 1978**  
**MIKE MELANCON**  
of Emerson Drive

**AUG. 14, 1941**  
**CONNIE SMITH**

**AUG. 16, 1939**  
**BILLY JOE SHAVER**

**AUG. 16, 1986**  
**ASHTON SHEPHERD**

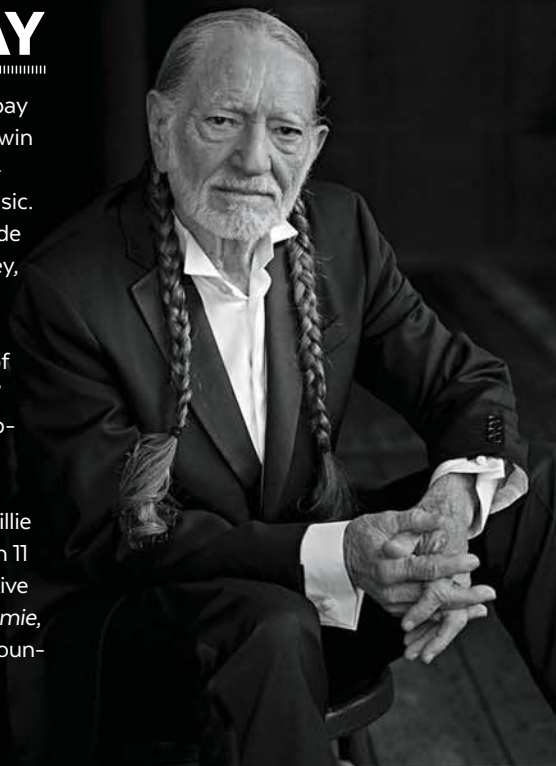
**AUG. 16, 1987**  
**DAN SMYERS**  
of Dan + Shay

## THE WILLIE WAY

In November, the Library of Congress will pay tribute to **WILLIE NELSON** with the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, an award that honors an artist’s lifetime achievements in music. Past recipients of the Gershwin Prize include Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, Paul McCartney, Carole King, Billy Joel and songwriting duo Burt Bacharach and the late Hal David.

“It is an honor to be the next recipient of the Gershwin Prize. I appreciate it greatly,” Willie said about the award that was established in 2007 and named for composers George and Ira Gershwin.

Over the course of the last six decades, Willie has recorded more than 60 albums and won 11 Grammys. This year he released a collaborative album with Merle Haggard, *Django and Jimmie*, which debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard*’s Top Country Albums chart. Willie is also a fifth-degree blackbelt in the Korean martial art Gong-Kwon Yusul, so bow to your sensei.



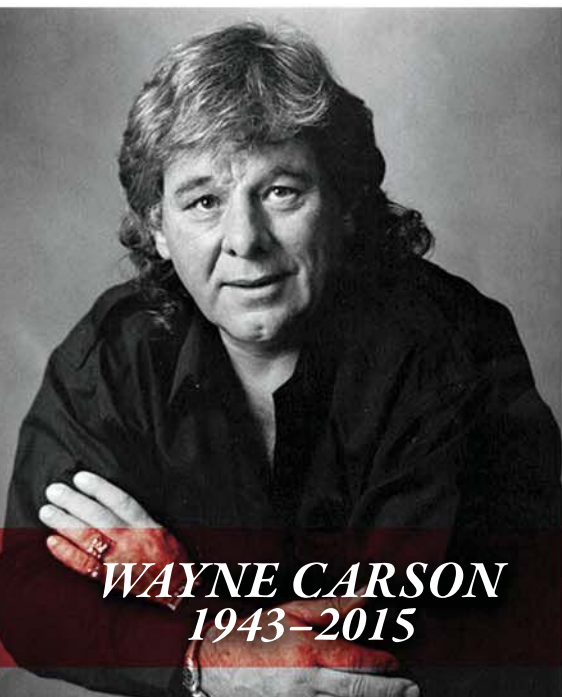
# A SONG WALKS INTO A NO. 1

**TYLER FARR, "A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR"  
NO. 1 PARTY | WINNER'S, NASHVILLE**

It could only happen in Nashville. "A guy walks into a bar" and walks out with a No. 1 single. That's how it happened when Tyler Farr took part in a Music City publisher's pub crawl and heard singer/songwriter Jonathan Singleton perform "A Guy Walks Into a Bar" at Winner's on Music Row. So, it's fitting that Tyler and the song's other writers, Melissa Peirce and Old Dominion's Brad Tursi, chose Winner's as the site for their No. 1 celebration. And while it was a hot day, and getting hotter as industry VIPs filled the local industry hang, it was very cool to see Melissa and Brad receive their first No. 1 kudos, while it was a whopping sixth No. 1 for Jonathan.

After receiving plaques, medals and guitars, Tyler thanked his record label team, which tirelessly promoted the song to country radio, along with the writers, and told them, "Thank you for continuing to write great country songs. Songs that have a hook and tell a story. Please don't stop."

Congratulations, all!



**WAYNE CARSON**  
1943–2015

**WAYNE CARSON**, a prolific songwriter best known for his award-winning "Always on My Mind," died July 20 at age 72 from congestive heart failure and other ailments. Wayne was a member of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Born in Denver, Wayne moved to Nashville in 1962 and found his first major songwriting success with Eddy Arnold's "Somebody Like Me," a No. 1 hit in 1966. The following year, Memphis-based rock band The Box Tops took Wayne's song "The Letter" to the top of the pop charts. "The Letter" became a rock and pop classic and was rerecorded several times, including versions by Joe Cocker, Al Green and Johnny Rivers.

Easily Wayne's most awarded song was the tender ballad "Always on My Mind," first recorded by Elvis Presley

and Brenda Lee. The definitive version was cut by Willie Nelson, who turned it into a No. 1 country hit in 1982. "Always on My Mind" won the Country Music Association award for Song of the Year in 1982 and 1983 and copped Grammy awards in 1983 for Country Song of the Year and the all-genre Song of the Year. Wayne had often noted that he wrote most of "Always on My Mind" in about 10 minutes at his home in Springfield, Mo., and completed it with co-writers Johnny Christopher and Mark James.

Wayne wrote additional hits, like "She's Actin' Single (I'm Drinkin' Doubles)," a No. 1 for Gary Stewart in 1975, "Neon Rainbow" and "Soul Deep" for The Box Tops and Conway Twitty's 1974 No. 1 "I See the Want To in Your Eyes." He was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1997.



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# SWINGING SUTLER

**A classic Nashville restaurant/music venue gets a cool refresher.**



The Sutler owners,  
Joe Parkes Jr. (left)  
and Austin Ray

One of Nashville's landmark venues, The Sutler, recently underwent a facelift—and now, the saloon swings mightier than ever. The historic restaurant/music club originally opened in 1976 and played host to legendary acts like Johnny Cash, Townes Van Zandt, Steve Earle, Emmylou Harris and Dale Watson while also serving as an outlet for such up-and-comers as Dierks Bentley. Music industry types and songwriters also gathered

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at The Sutler to talk business, down a few brews and swap stories.

The doors were closed for a while, but a couple of restaurateurs, who frequented the original, reimagined and refurbished The Sutler this past year. Native Nashvillians Austin Ray and Joe Parkes Jr. were former patrons of the





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**GARNISH** with a watermelon slice and serve over ice in your favorite red plastic cup.



**Florida Georgia Line** recently played a special one-off show at The Sutler.



original Sutler and brought it back to life as part of a massive arts, dining and urban living revival of the Melrose neighborhood and the 8th Avenue corridor.

New offerings include a full lunch menu and a Sunday gathering known as Grass Fed Sundays, featuring live bluegrass music along with a full supper. The place has also been spiffed up a bit, which hasn't gone unnoticed, points out co-owner Austin.

"Dierks Bentley was in here recently," Austin says.

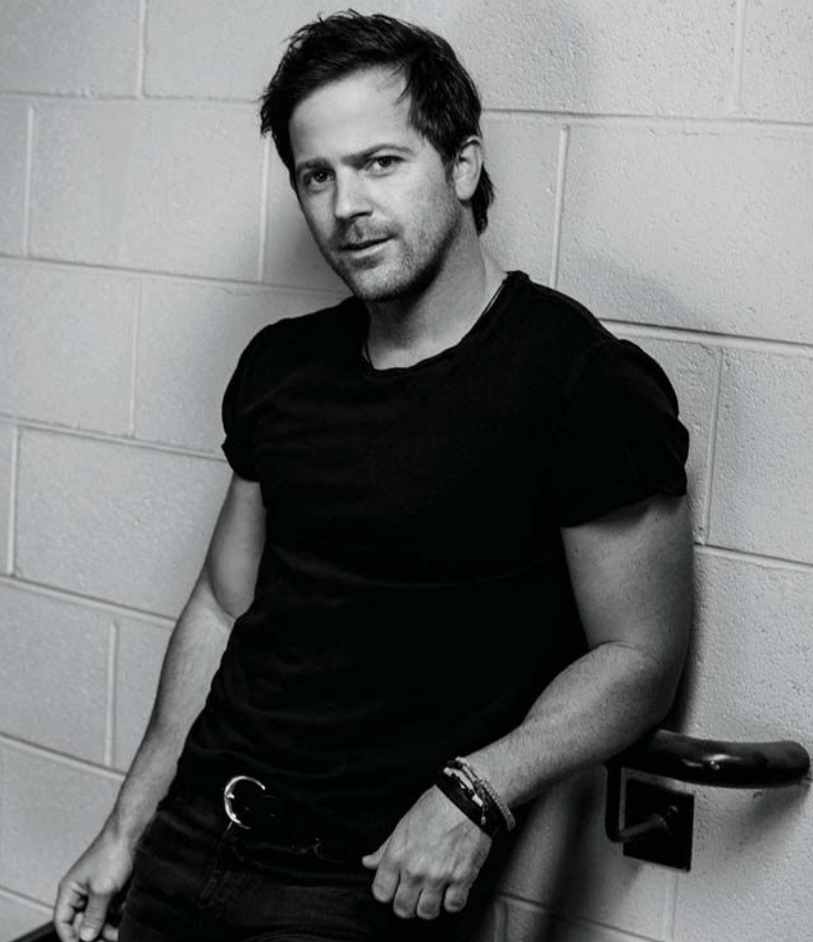
"He told us that he had a great experience playing here when he was just starting out, but it's a lot cleaner now."

As far as the daily menu, Austin notes that the hot chicken nuggets and catfish tacos are two of the most in-demand items. Regulars also gather for the full bar, which whips up signature cocktails like the Field Party.

Check out this slice of Music City history next time you visit.

**BOB PAXMAN**





## Album



### Kip Moore

*Wild Ones*

MCA NASHVILLE

**B+**

The final song on Kip's long-awaited sophomore album, *Wild Ones*, is an anthemic number titled "Comeback Kid" that describes a hard-nosed fighter of a guy who gets knocked down but never gives up. It's a narrative

that is weaved into countless '80s films but could just as easily describe Kip's journey in country music. After a big start with No. 1s like "Beer Money" and "Hey Pretty Girl," his next two singles ("Young Love," "Dirt Road") didn't take and it looked like we might never hear from the Georgia native again. Instead, he returned to the drawing board to find some middle ground where attaining commercial success wouldn't mean losing his soul. The result feels a little something like those beloved '80s movies in spirit and aesthetic. The closest *Wild Ones* comes to straight-up

bro-country is on the title track, a simmering hymn about (bro alert!) partying all night long. But with its thunderous percussion and sky-bound chorus hook, it sounds more like Pat Benatar in "We Belong" mode. Kip's vocal delivery, throaty and intense, also adds a blue-collar urgency even to the songs about the good times, as if those things are not merely mindless fun but actually essential for living. On "What Ya Got on Tonight," a pedal-down rocker that blends Tom Petty's "Runnin' Down a Dream" and Don Henley's "Boys of Summer," distance from his love interest has put

him over the edge and he begs for a picture of her outfit to keep him from losing his mind. There are a couple misfires—"Lipstick" relies too heavily on the list-making approach, and "That's Alright With Me" is pretty much "The Joker" in disguise—but Kip seems to have dodged the sophomore slump. And with songs like "Complicated," where the scrappy underdog kid persuades the good girl to run off with him, you're just one John Cusack shy of cinema gold.

**JON FREEMAN**

**AT A GLANCE:** An '80s Heartland rock album that's made for right now.



## Singles

# THE NCW JUKEBOX

**Essential  
songs from the  
artists featured  
in this issue**

**LUKE BRYAN**

"Kick the Dust Up"

**MICHAEL RAY**

"Kiss You in the Morning"

**THE  
STEELDRIVERS**

"Six Feet Away"

**RAELYNN**

"For a Boy"

**JAKE OWEN**

"Real Life"

**COLT FORD**

"Cut 'Em All"

**DARYLE  
SINGLETARY**

"Too Much Fun"

**DALE WATSON**

"Blessed or Damned"

**ZAC BROWN BAND**

"Loving You Easy"

**BRETT ELDREDGE**

"Lose My Mind"

**THOMAS RHETT**

"Crash and Burn"

LOOK  
FOR THIS  
NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY  
PLAYLIST ON

**rdio**

## Jerrod Niemann "Blue Bandana"

SEA GAYLE/ARISTA NASHVILLE

**B-**

Jerrod Niemann's new single, "Blue Bandana," written by Ben Goldsmith, C.J. Solar and Andrew Scott Wills, pays homage to the nomadic girl in the blue bandana who always seems to be in attendance at a fill-in-the-blank list of outdoor festivals that get name-dropped, including Bonnaroo, Coachella and Lollapalooza. While the song's narrative sounds like part two of Kenny Chesney's "Wild Child," the stripped-back country-rock jam is a stylistic step in the right direction from Jerrod's asinine "Donkey" and buzzless "Buzz Back Girl" in 2014.

**JIM CASEY**

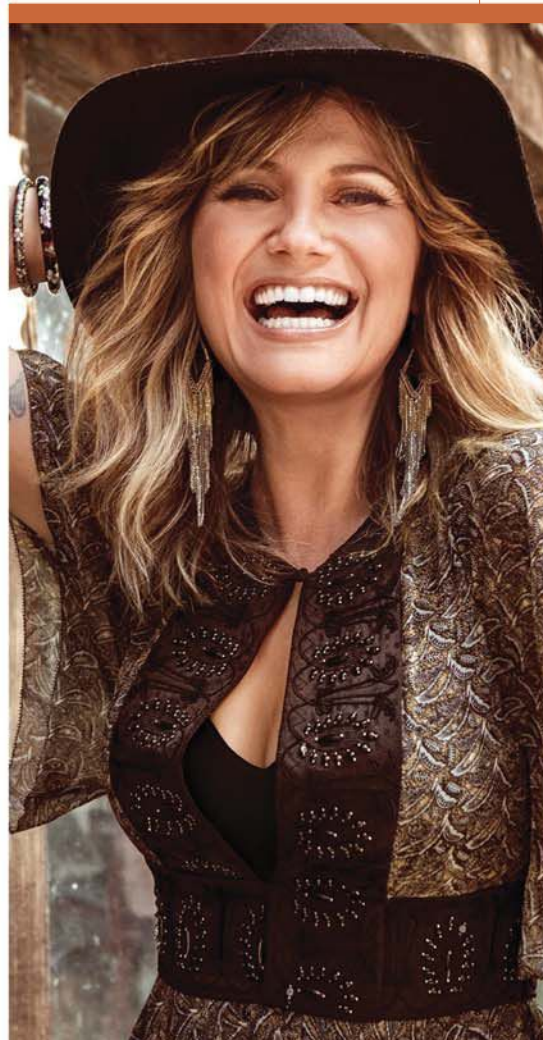
## Terri Clark "I Cheated on You"

BARETRACK RECORDS

**B+**

By far one of the most underappreciated female vocalists in country music, Terri Clark is back on the U.S. airwaves with the spunky new single "I Cheated on You." If you've ever spent five minutes with the talented singer, you know that the fun-loving and gregarious Canadian is a perfect fit for the kiss-off lyric written by Brent Anderson, Brandy Clark and Forrest Whitehead. Killer production from Michael Knox gives the tune a contemporary feel, but from the top of her cowboy hat to the toes of her boots, Terri's loyalty, and twang, is obvious. She could never be unfaithful to country music.

**TAMMY RAGUSA**



## Jennifer Nettles "Sugar"

EMI NASHVILLE

**B+**

Only a singer with Jennifer's sass, humor and R&B chops could pull off this aggressive yet playful number that's pretty up-front in its intent. You don't have to be Fellini or a *Psychology Today* subscriber to figure out what's going on here, not with lyrics like, *They want my sugar and spice and everything nice . . . But I'm never, never, never, never ever gonna give 'em a piece.* Writers Jennifer, Brandy Clark and Jessie Jo Dillon even throw in the "cherry pie" metaphor, one of the oldest (but still nicely serviceable) in music annals, dating all the way back to the 1960s hit of the same name. But it's all done with a winking humor and a solid, reggae-ish beat, with Jennifer delivering a nicely funky performance. (Love the way she pronounces "sugar" as "sugah.") The bridge seems to take some momentum away, at least at first listen, though the song quickly builds up again. "Sugar" will surely remind fans of some of the classic Sugarland material, which might also up its chances for radio airplay. And that would be nice.

**BOB PAXMAN**



# Thank *you* very much

On Aug. 16, 1977, the world lost an icon when **ELVIS PRESLEY** passed away, but every year music fans mark the date as a celebration of his life and the contributions he made to music and pop culture. Although he is known as the King of Rock 'n' Roll, Elvis was a seminal influence in country music, and he also had a huge impact in the world of fashion. So, dust off your blue suede shoes—or get yourself some blue suede boots—and let's dance to the "Jailhouse Rock."



Frankie Ballard



Carrie Underwood

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**AUG. 14**

**Charlotte, N.C.**

PNC Music Pavilion

**AUG. 15**

**Burgettstown, Pa.**

First Niagara Pavilion

**AUG. 20**

**Beaumont, Texas**

Ford Park

**AUG. 21**

**Austin, Texas**

Austin360 Amphitheater

**AUG. 22**

**Dallas**

Gexa Energy Pavilion

**AUG. 27**

**Bakersfield, Calif.**

Rabobank Arena

**AUG. 28**

**Wheatland, Calif.**

Toyota Amphitheatre

**SEPT. 10**

**Holmdel, N.J.**

PNC Bank Arts Center

**SEPT. 11**

**Hartford, Conn.**

Xfinity Theatre

**SEPT. 12**

**Mansfield, Mass.**

Xfinity Center

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**SEPT. 25**

**Tulsa, Okla.**

BOK Center

**SEPT. 26**

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**Chula Vista, Calif.**

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**OCT. 9**

**Albuquerque, N.M.**

Isleta Amphitheatre

**OCT. 10**

**Phoenix**

Ak-Chin Pavilion

**OCT. 15**

**Southaven, Miss.**

BankPlus Amphitheater at  
Snowden Grove

**OCT. 16**

**New Orleans**

Smoothie King Center

**OCT. 17**

**Atlanta**

Aaron's Amphitheatre at Lakewood



# NASH **NEXT**

**ARTIST SPOTLIGHT**



## SUNSHINE STATE OF MIND

**MICHAEL RAY'S** COUNTRY MUSIC CAREER IS HEATING UP WITH THE RELEASE OF HIS SELF-TITLED DEBUT ALBUM AND LEAD SINGLE, "KISS YOU IN THE MORNING." **STORY BY JIM CASEY**



**O**n one of those unbearably stifling Nashville days in late July, being outside just isn't prudent at the moment unless there is a body of water close by and a cold drink to be had. As much as heat-seeking Florida native Michael Ray would like to be partaking in those recreational activities, he's holed up at his label's office on Music Row, sweating on the inside. It's not the heat that's getting to him—the AC is blasting—it's the anticipation of what's ahead that's causing his internal combustion. His self-titled debut album is dropping on Aug. 7 and his debut single, "Kiss You in the Morning," just hit No. 3 on *Billboard's* Country Airplay chart.

When Michael talks about his journey to becoming a breakout star, one word keeps surfacing: "crazy."

Indeed, it has been a crazy ride for Michael, 27, since moving to Nashville six years ago from Eustis, Fla. (population 20,000), to pursue his country music dreams. Hell, it's been a crazy ride in the five months since our last sit-down with him at Nashville's Country Radio Seminar in February, when "Kiss You in the Morning" became the second-most-added song to country radio that week. Since then, Michael has debuted at the Grand Ole Opry—playing four subsequent shows—and joined the back end of Sam Hunt's Lipstick Graffiti Tour, all while recording his debut album and watching "Kiss You in the Morning" climb the charts. Not to jinx him, but it's looking like he could have a No. 1 song by the time this magazine is on stands.

"It's crazy, but we're going hard for that No. 1 song right now," says Michael. "Things are happening so quickly, in ways I didn't expect. I'm so grateful to country radio and country fans for embracing me. It's like in the blink of an eye everything is happening. I'm very grateful to be a part of it, from the single to the album to playing at the Opry five times. It doesn't get normal to play the Opry, I don't think it ever will."

Michael's country roots began to sprout when he was a little tyke in Florida. His





## MICHAEL'S 4 FLORIDA FAVORITES

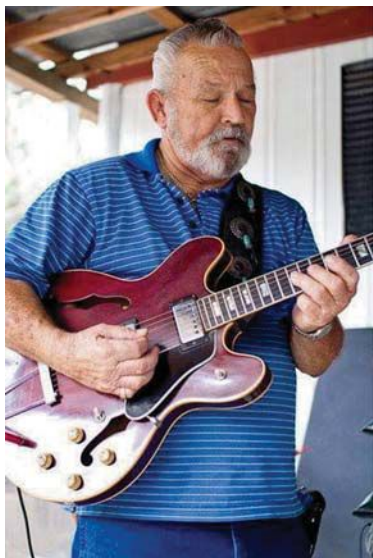
**1** I love the Florida heat because we have all these lakes and beaches. I can go from being in the woods to just an hour away from the beach.

**2** The melting pot of people, especially the snowbirds. I used to love to meet them and talk to them.

**3** I love fact we have so many college football teams, Florida, Florida State, Miami, USF, UCF. There's never a lack of games anywhere we go.

**4** I love my locals bars. One of my buddies owns the bar 1884. It's on the main strip in downtown Eustis where we hang. I love the whole vibe of Eustis' downtown. Another place is Al's Sandbar, which is on the water with a beach atmosphere where my buddies play. That's Florida to me. Seeing kids jumping in the water with friends and family with good music playing.





(Left) Michael's grandfather, who taught him to play guitar, passed away earlier this year; (right) Sam Hunt (right) and Jesse Rice sandwich a smiling Michael after one of his shows in 2014; (below) Michael spends some time in the studio working on his new record; (below right) Michael makes his Grand Ole Opry debut in April 2015.



grandfather, father, uncle and cousins played in a family band called The Country Cousins. Naturally, 5-year-old Michael would join them onstage, strumming his Kermit the Frog guitar that he imagined was plugged in. When he was 9 years old, he decided he really wanted to learn to play guitar, so his dad and grandfather began teaching him. Guitar became his obsession, and he started playing gigs with his grandfather on the weekends at community centers and American Legion posts, jamming to the classic country tunes of Ray Price, Porter Wagoner, Bobby

Bare and Earl Thomas Conley. By the time he was in high school, Michael was playing local bars with the itch to give Music City a try after graduation.

"I headed to Nashville to check out the studios and stuff but nobody would meet with me except David Preston (director writer/publisher relations) at BMI, and he said, 'I like what you've got, but don't move here, the industry is changing. Go back home and create the biggest thing you can down there in a way that people have to listen and then you can prove to Nashville you belong.'"

That's basically Texas Country Music 101: own your home state before you move. So Michael hit the Florida scene as hard as he could for the next few years and developed an impassioned fan base before moving to Nashville in 2010. Once in Music City, he busted the road and began playing every hole in the wall that he could. It was the old-school way of doing things, playing clubs and handing out demos like a couple of his heroes used to do.

"I grew up listening to Waylon [Jennings] and Loretta [Lynn] and stories about them traveling across

per by Kevin Feguson/Cumulus; Opry photo by Chris Hall/Hallo Photographics/  
Grand Ole Opry; all other photos courtesy Michael Ray social media



# MAGIC BUS

Now that his career is motoring along, Michael Ray is experiencing another rite of passage: he's saying goodbye to his 11-passenger van and upgrading to a tour bus on Aug. 12.

"We're going out with a bang on our last van tour," says Michael. "We're starting on the West Coast—our fourth time going coast to coast in the van—and driving across the country. It's bittersweet because my band has been with me since day one and we've embraced the van. You have no choice but to get way close with your buddies in a van, but I'm very happy to move onto the bus. Now everyone will have bunks and we won't be sleeping under bench seats. Maybe we should have a funeral for the van."

country to different radio stations and clubs to get their music out, and by the time they got back to where they started, they were on the radio," says Michael. "All of my influences, that's how they did it. That's the only way I knew how to do it, go out there and make one-on-one connections with fans on the road and learn how to be an entertainer."

Working the club-to-club beat paid off in spades a few years later when Michael signed with Warner Bros. in 2013. Now, upon the release of his self-titled debut album, a 12-song offering produced by Scott Hendricks

(Alan Jackson, Blake Shelton) that features some of Nashville's most talented songwriters, including Rhett Akins ("Another Girl"), Shane McAnally ("Look Like This"), Brad and Brett Warren ("Real Men Love Jesus") and John Rich ("Run Away With You"), Michael is primed for breakout country stardom.

"Being on the road helped me so much while recording this album because I got to see what worked at live shows, and I wanted to translate the live show into the record because that's one thing I've always loved about Keith Urban records or Garth

Brooks records, they feel live when you put them on," says Michael.

"Every time I went into the studio, I had learned something from being on tour, so I got to take that back to the studio. There were songs I wrote that didn't make the record because they weren't connecting during my live shows. My job is to make the best record I can for the fans. It's crazy, but I think we did it."

If that's crazy, Michael will probably find comfort in this chestnut from Waylon Jennings: *I've always been crazy, but it's kept me from going insane.* **N**







(From left) Mike Fleming, Tammy Rogers, Gary Nichols, Richard Bailey and Brent Truitt



# A NEW GROOVE

THE STEELDRIVERS EMBRACE CHANGE ON THEIR LATEST ALBUM, *THE MUSCLE SHOALS RECORDINGS*.

As she was preparing to work on a new album, The SteelDrivers' fiddle player, Tammy Rogers, was presented with a difficult question by one of the founders of the group's label, Rounder Records. He asked her to consider what would make the album stand out from the band's discography and the abundance of other music so readily available.

She had to think about that. The band had grown steadily in acclaim since the release of 2008's *The SteelDrivers* and 2010's *Reckless*, which featured ferocious lead singer Chris Stapleton, and 2012's *Hammer Down* with new singer Gary Nichols.

"As an artist you want to keep growing and hopefully take your fan base that you've built along with you on the journey but it's important that you don't fall into, well here's our ballad, here's our traditional-sounding bluegrass tune, here's our blues thing," she muses. "It occurred to me, even later on that day, we need to go to Muscle Shoals. That's where Gary's from. It's time."

And so the band's fourth full-length album, *The Muscle Shoals Recordings*, was recorded in late 2014 in the small north Alabama town that spawned some of the greatest recordings of all time: Aretha Franklin's "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Loved You," Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman" and The Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers*, among countless others. While you won't hear any B3 or drums on *Muscle Shoals*, the group—Tammy, Gary, Mike Fleming, Richard Bailey and Brent Truitt—connects the dots between the grooves of soul music and the instrumental traditions of bluegrass.

It also highlights Gary as a singer, who howls like a man possessed on the swampy, Gothic opening track, "Long Way Down." It's a coming-out party of sorts for Gary, who initially joined the band in 2010 with the unenviable job of filling Chris Stapleton's considerable shoes.

The Muscle Shoals native had previously been through the major label grinder, releasing the underrated, mostly slept-on singles "Un-

broken Ground" and "I Can't Love You Any-more" through Mercury Nashville in the mid-'00s. His bluesy inflections and gravelly tone made him a capable replacement for Chris, but the band had already built a fan base based on the two albums with its original singer.

"Early on in the band, obviously, I think [Gary] felt compelled to honor the versions of those songs we'd done with Chris in the band," explains Tammy. "And the more we played them and the more we meshed and gelled as a band, the more he started pushing them and putting his own stamp on it than just trying to honor Chris' version."

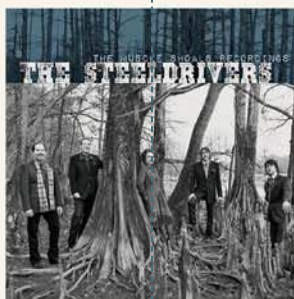
On *Muscle Shoals*, Gary emerges as a distinct lead singer, guitar picker and accomplished songwriter, having contributed several of the selections along with Tammy. The band also finds some new freedom in laying back and follow-

ing the rhythm over flashy fills, seamlessly moving from honky-tonk in "Drinkin' Alone" to a rowdy waltz in "Ashes of Yesterday."

"If I had to point to one thing it would be thinking in terms more of a rhythmic approach: what I could do to help the groove and make it a different feeling groove than, say, your typical bluegrassy thing," says Tammy.

Unlike many other bluegrass bands, The SteelDrivers have long preferred songs to technically challenging instrumental workouts. *Muscle Shoals* is packed full of songs that often veer toward darker topics like the murder ballad "Brother John" or the Civil War lament "River Runs Red" but those are contrasted against the lighter atmosphere of "Hangin' Around" and "Too Much." Though the band has faced some big lineup changes in recent years, this aspect of its existence hasn't wavered.

"The thing that kept the band unique and kept the band going has been the original idea of songs existing because of songs and writing our own catalog," says Tammy. "That hasn't changed from day one. If nothing else, I guess the whole philosophy of the band has stayed intact from the very beginning." **JON FREEMAN**







# Answering the Call

When **Musicians On Call** needed an artist to lift the spirits of hospitalized children, **RaeLynn** was ready and willing.

**SHE'S A YOUNG WOMAN HERSELF**, but you can tell that RaeLynn, 21, has a soft spot in her heart for kids. Her voice all but dances when she talks about her recent visit to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, where she met with and performed for patients as part of Musicians On Call.

"It was amazing," she tells *Nash Country Weekly*. "We're always on the road as artists, and we're always traveling and kind of getting caught up in ourselves, so to be able to go to Vanderbilt and see these families that have to stay there for long periods of time, that's their life at this point, to be able to go and brighten their day, it brightens our day."

Being a volunteer for Musicians On Call is as much a blessing for RaeLynn as it is for the patients she vis-

its. "To be a part of Musicians On Call and to go make somebody's day is the coolest thing ever and it makes you feel great to do something for somebody else," she says. "It touches you. It's really important for musicians to give back, especially when God gave us this gift to sing and perform."

RaeLynn learned the healing power of music firsthand when she was hospitalized for three weeks as a young girl. Around the age of 12 she was diagnosed with diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). She explains, "It's when your sugar stays up for so long that your organs start shutting down. It was bad. My mom didn't recognize anything different because I was getting a little taller and she thought I was losing weight because I was becoming



# Music Makers

**Musicians On Call** is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to deliver live, in-room musical performances in healthcare facilities to patients undergoing treatment or unable to leave their beds. They have branches in New York, Miami, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Nashville, among other cities. To learn more, go to [MusiciansOnCall.org](http://MusiciansOnCall.org).



Whether holding a singalong or serenading with a lullaby, RaeLynn witnessed firsthand the healing power of music.



a woman. But it wasn't that. It was my diabetes." Her cousin, who sings contemporary Christian music, would visit her in the hospital and play his new songs. RaeLynn smiles remembering, "I'll never forget how that made me feel. It was so good to have family and friends sing to me. It made me feel like I was home."

Now she finds healing power in putting pen to paper. "As a songwriter, I write from the heart, I write to make myself feel better," she says. "It's therapeutic for me."

RaeLynn visited with 24 patients when she stopped by Vanderbilt Children's Hospital on June 30.

"My favorite thing was there were a couple of baby girls and I sang 'God Made Girls' to them. I was a wreck by the end of it," she laughs. But she also saw the im-

pact that her songs had, not only on children, but also on parents. "One mom said, 'My family is really musical, but you don't understand what a blessing it is for you to come sing to our first baby girl. This just made our day.'"

For another patient, who was still under the effects of anesthesia following surgery, RaeLynn made a video for when she woke. And for a couple of others, she performed a sassy, countrified version of Megan Trainor's "All About That Bass."

She dismisses the notion that what she did that day was anything extraordinary. "It's just crazy," she says. "That took me an hour and a half to do that. What's an hour and a half of your day to literally go touch somebody's life?"

**TAMMY RAGUSA**



# Country's *Hottest* BACHELORETTE

CAST YOUR VOTE - [COUNTRYWEEKLY.COM](http://COUNTRYWEEKLY.COM)

Country artists tend to couple up and get married young, so it's quite the hunt to find ones who haven't. This time around, we looked at the lovely single ladies of country and discovered a group as diverse as their incredible musical output. Choose your favorites, but let's be real, guys, you're gonna need more game than a Twitter troll to get a date.



**LAUREN  
ALAINA**



**KATIE  
ARMIGER**



**KELSEA  
BALLERINI**



**DANIELLE  
BRADBERRY**



**LAURA BELL  
BUNDY**



**CAM**



**BRANDY  
CLARK**



**TERRI  
CLARK**





**SHERYL  
CROW**



**TAE DYE  
MADDIE & TAE**



**LINDSAY  
ELL**



**MICKEY  
GUYTON**



**KRISTEN  
KELLY**



**MADDIE MARLOW  
MADDIE & TAE**



**KACEY  
MUSGRAVES**



**CASSADEE  
POPE**



**RAINEY  
QUALLEY**



**RAELYNN**



**RACHEL REINERT  
GLORIANA**



**SARAH ZIMMERMANN  
STRIKING MATCHES**



# THE PERFECT WAVE

**JAKE OWEN shows off his affinity for wakesurfing in a Tennessee waterway.**



**J**ake Owen vividly remembers the day he landed his first back flip on a wakeboard. He'd been out on the water with a friend of his all summer and they were testing their limits to master the trick.

"We used to have this thing growing up. We had this stupid little trophy that my buddy's dad made up and we called it 'Mr. Wakeboard,' and whoever could land the first back flip on a wakeboard got that trophy," Jake recalls. The boat they were using was an old model with an outboard engine and couldn't generate a big wake, adding to the difficul-

ty of the trick. As it turned out, Jake's friend was the first to stick the back flip. "I was so mad because he landed it and then when it was my turn I landed it," he says. "So, it was the same day that we did it, but it took both of us pushing each other. And you know how it is, once you do it once, from that point forward, it's just like riding a bike. It's easy."

It's easy for an experienced wakeboarder like Jake to pull off, at any rate. Some of Jake's fans have gotten to see firsthand just how skilled the Florida native is on the water, whether through videos taken by his team members or when he invited a few Twitter followers

out to join him on the lake. *Nash Country Weekly* had never had the pleasure until July, when he invited us and a few friends to join him at Commodore Yacht Club on Nashville's west side to take a ride on his boat and talk about his love for life on the water.

In fact, Jake has parlayed that passion into a partnership with the folks at Discover Boating, an awareness campaign that encourages people to enjoy the lakes and waterways of North America responsibly. In Jake's case, he's getting his feet wet (pun intended) and pushing his abilities even further with the growing activity/sport of wakesurfing.





**Jake invited a handful of lucky Twitter followers to join him for a day on the lake.**



The “Real Life” singer explains to us the difference between wakeboarding and wakesurfing. “If you’re riding 80 feet back, then you’re definitely wakeboarding. If you’re riding 10 feet back, you’re wakesurfing . . . with no rope,” he says, flashing a mischievous grin. That’s right: no rope; no lifeline to use for balance, tension or leverage. It’s just Jake and his keen skills.

Nevertheless, Jake made it look easy as he eased himself from the rear of the boat into the white wake it produced. And when he easily tossed the rope to his friends on board, he looked as comfortable as if he were

onstage. As much natural aptitude as Jake obviously has for board-related sports, he reminds us that it was actually wakeboarding that cost him his college golf scholarship and brought him to music. “It’s the thing that changed my whole life and gave me the scar from there to there,” he says, gesturing over his shoulder. “I went to do a weird trick and my arm got yanked one way.” But the glass-half-full country star smiles and adds, “So, I got a job playing guitar on a barstool. And that is still what I do.”

Being on the boat isn’t just about wakesurfing for Jake, though. He feels

a sense of peace whenever he’s on the water. “Sometimes I’ll just come out here by myself and ride, like this, just listen to music,” he says. “When I was making my last couple of records, I would come out, because it sounds so good on this boat. I would go to the back of the boat and lay in the sun and chill out. The only time I hear my stuff when I make my record is in my car. But there’s something about when people come out on the weekend and listen to music and blare it with their friends on a boat.”

Aye aye, Captain Jake.

**TAMMY RAGUSA**



A full-page photograph of a man with dark hair and a beard, smiling, standing in a hallway. He is wearing a dark V-neck t-shirt and blue jeans with a silver belt. The hallway has a brick wall on the left and large white pipes running along the ceiling. The word "GUIDING" is overlaid in large, bold, black letters on the left side of the image.

# GUIDING



## **LUKE BRYAN**

**is growing up just like the rest of us, but his new album suggests he isn't ready to leave the party just yet.**

# LIGHTS

STORY BY JON FREEMAN





W

hen **LUKE BRYAN** played his first stadium show in Nashville at Vanderbilt Stadium on July 11, it was largely the good-spirited party you'd expect. Bare-shouldered men and women downed adult beverages in the suffocating heat, singing along to every word of one of Luke's many hit songs.

And yet it was somehow also different than you'd expect. Luke has certainly transformed into a performer worthy of his dual ACM and CMA Entertainer of the Year wins, but this show on the Kick the Dust Up Tour was hardly an orgy of the bro-country party jams often associated with him. Sure, tunes like "Kick the Dust Up" and "That's My Kind of Night" book-ended the show. But much of the time between was devoted to Luke's more sensitive midtempo songs, like "Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye" and "Someone Else Calling You Baby," as well as ballads like "Do I" and "Drink a Beer."

"That's predominantly the meat of the show in the middle," Luke affirms to *Nash Country Weekly*, visiting the office just two days after that sold-out hometown show. "It's surprising. I think my show is grown-up in that sense—in that it's not an hour and 45 minutes of all spring break songs and stuff like that. But that doesn't mean they won't ever come back."

He looks a little sleepy this morning, dressed casually—or stage ready, in his case—in a white T-shirt, blue jeans and baseball cap. Hard to say for sure, but that sleepy appearance may stem from having just weathered his first public relations controversy as a superstar over the weekend with some comments about Outlaw country (see sidebar, page 44). He's on the other side of it now, a bit shaken up, but looking ahead to an exciting summer.

Earlier in 2015, Luke played his final spring break concert in Panama

City Beach, Fla., (after seven straight years) and closed that particular chapter of his life. It was a subtle nod to the unassailable fact that even country music's king of spring break, now 39 years old, has to grow up eventually.

But as with most things, Luke's transformation isn't happening like a light switch flipping on and off. Growing up is one of those gradual processes that isn't very noticeable day-to-day, but there are undoubtedly shades of it all over his fifth full-length album, *Kill the Lights*.





Luke pulled out all the stops for his Vanderbilt Stadium show, bringing along Dustin Lynch, Thomas Rhett, Randy Houser and Florida Georgia Line.



Of course, that means he couldn't completely leave the party jams behind for an entire album of sensitive balladry. The album's lead single, "Kick the Dust Up," a meaty slab of Asian-glazed country rock aimed squarely at the tailgate crowd, was proof positive of that. It's brawny and simple-minded like its logical predecessor, "That's My Kind of Night," but kind of impossible to forget once you've heard it. Luke sees the need to record songs like that in very populist, business-savvy terms: retention of fans from years past and conversion of new ones.

"It's all within a comfortable framework for me," he says. "I want everybody to be able to have a stake in my album and a song that really affects them, whether you're 14 or 16 or 30 or all through the gamut of ages."

So *Kill the Lights* is necessarily wide in scope, but can almost

be divided cleanly into two halves: party-friendly backwoods tailgater Luke, and the more reflective side of the Leesburg, Ga., native. On the party side, many songs tread some familiar themes for Luke: dancing women, moonlight romance, unfailingly rural settings. The title track incorporates many of these, but employs a skeletal bass and guitar figure like Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust" for a sonic twist.

"You've heard Bruno Mars with 'Uptown Funk,'" Luke says, referencing the unstoppable pop hit of early 2015. "That's kind of a retro take where he went back in the—what's the word—he kind of rewound the clock. And I think this one does that a little bit, too, but with me . . . with my country voice singing it."

Luke has never shied away from a romantic song either, as indicated by "I Don't Want This Night to End" or "Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye." But he takes it a step further on *Kill the Lights* with "Strip It Down," a slow jam that was intended for sexy times if ever there was one. With descriptions like *feeling my belt turn loose from these old blue jeans*, the action taking place in the song should be pretty clear to anyone who has rounded the bases. You have to wonder how Luke's wife, Caroline, feels about him singing songs like this one to throngs of screaming women several nights a week on tour.

"Through the years you write hundreds of songs, and when I play it for my wife, I'm not gonna try to misrepresent anything," he explains. "She agrees that 'Strip It Down' is pretty dang hot and sexy. So I think it's a fine line where you're trying to say stuff in your art, but you certainly don't want to make your wife mad or certainly your fans and do something that's so over the top that it's not comfortable."

Perhaps thankfully, it stops short of describing the entire act, leaving the most private details to the imagination.

"Exactly. It doesn't get icky," Luke

## PLAYA'S ANTHEM

Luke retired his spring break shows in March 2015, but his popular Farm Tour, which visits agricultural communities and awards scholarships to students in those towns, will continue in September with a whole new list of stops.

"We've launched some new Farm Tour locations and dates," he says. "Doesn't mean we won't revisit old Farm Tour sites, we're just sprinkling in new areas, and the Farm Tour feels bigger than ever this year."



Additionally, Luke's still-new Crash My Playa event in Riviera Maya, Mexico, will return for a second year Jan. 22-26, 2016, and has kind of replaced spring break as Luke's annual party of choice.

"That was our first year we did that last year, and man, the company that I'm doing that with knocked it completely out of the park for fan experience," he says.

The upcoming event will boast performances from Luke as well as Dierks Bentley, Cole Swindell, Brett Eldredge, Sam Hunt, Chris Stapleton and Dustin Lynch.

Fans who opt in can choose from three different resorts in the tropical location and enjoy all-inclusive food and drinks, plus daily excursions for the adventurous. "I was amazed that fans were watching my show and there were waiters and waitresses handing out beers, and the fans, they don't have to go anywhere," Luke says. "Everything's inclusive. It was an amazing event."



# WRONG SIDE OF THE OUTLAW

It's hard to be the guy on top, because the things you say can come back to haunt you. Luke learned the hard way in July, when he gave an interview with *HitsDailyDouble* in which he talked about why he doesn't sing Outlaw country.

"I'm not big on looking back on the past. I'm not an outlaw country singer. I don't do cocaine and run around. So I'm not going to sing outlaw country," he said. "I like to hunt, fish, ride around on my farm, build a big bonfire and drink some beers—and that's what I sing about. It's what I know. I don't know about laying in the gutter, strung out on drugs."

Needless to say, the mischaracterization of Outlaw country as a druggy form of music (even though some of its chief practitioners were users at one time) was quoted ad nauseum in the country media the Friday before his show at Vanderbilt Stadium. It was not unlike the brouhaha surrounding Blake Shelton's "old farts and jackasses" quip a couple years back.

Luke defended his words with a series of Tweets, saying, "I would never speak against any musical artist. It's not my style. I consider Willie, Waylon and Merle musical heroes. I was trying to state what I was about and where I come from with my music."

Over this weekend, though, Luke took care to reach out to the artists and families of artists he had mentioned to apologize. That part was hard, he says, not knowing these artists well at all.

"It's totally that these are mythical people for me," he explains. "I'd hate the first correspondence I ever had with them would be talking about this."

One family member, Waylon Jennings' son Shooter, spoke to the *Los Angeles Times* about the apology that he and his mother, Jessi Colter, received.

"Luke Bryan called my mom today to clarify that he would never disrespect my dad or me or any of us," Shooter said. "I misfired and said some things in the past about people, namely John Mayer. And I didn't have the guts to apologize. So, that being said, that kinda won me over."

Luke also seems to understand that his comments came out at a time when everyone is vigorously (even angrily) discussing the format and genre. For some people who haven't warmed to his sound, his words were salt in the wound. So he doesn't expect it all to be OK right away.

"It can't physically go away in a day and it shouldn't," he says. "It's a big topic."

"I WAS TRYING  
TO STATE WHAT  
I WAS ABOUT  
AND WHERE  
I COME FROM  
WITH MY MUSIC."

## LUKE BRYAN CONTINUED

agrees, laughing. Elsewhere you'll find Little Big Town's Karen Fairchild stopping by for a duet on the revenge hook-up saga "Home Alone Tonight."

In the other half of the album, Luke adopts the reflective stance of a guy who has two growing sons and is about a year away from bidding his thirties adieu. In "Just Over," he bitterly comes to the realization that he's been dumped; in "Love It Gone," he pledges attention and comfort to a woman in the throes of a crisis; and in "Scarecrows," he touches on the place that shaped him and its dependable, slow-changing nature. For one of the album's finest moments, Luke sings the delicate, jazz-tinged "To the Moon and Back," by Tom Douglas, Hillary Lindsey and Tony Martin, and comes off sounding pretty classy.

There's also "Huntin' and Fishin' and Lovin' Every Day," which Luke wrote with his pals the Peach Pickers (Dallas Davidson, Ben Hayslip and Rhett Akins). While it adopts a lighter tone, "Huntin'" describes an outlook that Luke believes to be true of himself: both grateful and optimistic. "That may be one of my most favorite songs I've ever recorded," he says. "Just because I don't know if I've ever had the opportunity to tell my story or just really stamp who I am any better."

In total, Luke contributed six songs to *Kill the Lights* (compared to only two that made it to *Crash My Party*), including the dance track "Move" and the more nostalgic "Way Way Back." Oddly, it wasn't through some great burst of creativity that he ended up with more of his own this time around.

"I told somebody that I wrote 50 songs, 50 or 60 songs for *Crash My Party*, and I cut three of them," he says. "And I wrote 15 songs for *Kill the Lights* and I cut 10 or 11 of them. It was certainly not by design."

As is the usual line in Nashville, Luke says that the best songs have to win in service of the final product. In the case of *Kill the Lights*, he was pleased to see that some of his stood up to contributions from pros like Shane McAnally, Rodney Clawson and Luke Laird.

"I think it's about the album as a whole," he says. "When I saw the track listing, I was like, 'Oh, wow, I actually got a couple songs of mine on this thing.'"

He says this as if it wasn't entirely up to him, even though he's at a point in his career where he could plausibly record an all-acoustic songwriter album if he felt so compelled. It might sound like a stretch, but don't count it out completely.

"I think it would be a daunting task for me," he says. "I think a little four-song deal where I do that in a stripped-down acoustic situation. I thought would be cool in the future one of these days."

Another of Luke's songs, "Fast," seems to be a clear indicator of his growing up. The acoustic-guitar-driven tune touches on the rapid passage of time and how it only seems to accelerate as you get older.





(Clockwise from above) (From left) Dallas Davidson, Luke, Ben Hayslip and Rhett Akins; working on *Kill the Lights* in the studio; Luke's son Bo reels one in; Luke's wife, Caroline, shows her affection; son Tate hooks one at home.



"What makes our music special is we can put a song out like this and people, it'll make them reflect," he says. "If I put this song on the radio at some point in my career somebody will come up and say, 'You know what, me and my wife were going our separate ways and living too fast and this song helped us slow down and put a few things in perspective and take our kids camping.' And really, really, I think these songs are always really important in country music."

It's a notion that resonates in Luke's own life, as he's on the road for a significant portion of time as his sons, Bo and Tate, grow into young men. He says he's slowed down some from the earlier days when he was just trying to get known, but sometimes missing things is inevitable.

"There's no doubt that I miss way more than I should," he agrees. "Even now, I am blessed to be in a situation when I talk about my tour schedule and stuff we can go, 'Oh, the kids'll be in the heart of baseball. This'll be when we want to go do this trip to Disney World or something.' A

few years ago we were running and gunning so much taking every opportunity to perform and get in front of people. The option of me not being there was a little tougher. As I get older, as I mature and get older, as they get older, I will slow down and even take a month or two off at a time. Gosh, that's scary for me to even think about."

Because Luke seems to be the consummate entertainer, made for the stage and generous to the audiences that have shelled out money to come see him perform. Take him away from that, and he feels a bit lost.

"I've had a little more time off from touring this year just because we're not doing as many shows," he continues. "It's funny, anytime I'm home on a Friday or Saturday night, that's like such new territory for me. Me and Caroline, it's not even natural for us."

"I feel like I'm not working and somewhere out there there's a stage that I need to be standing on," he adds, sounding all the more like a grown-up. **NCW**





# CALLING HIS SHOTS

**COLT FORD** FOUND A PARTNER IN DUCK DYNASTY'S **WILLIE ROBERTSON** FOR HIS NEW SONG AND VIDEO, "CUT 'EM ALL."

**BELIEVE IT OR NOT**, there's a certain etiquette involved when crouched inside a dank, muddy duck blind at sunrise. Sure, the crew may look a bit unrefined with face paint, head-to-toe camo and shotguns in hand, but that's all about protocol, and there's not a bigger duck blind faux pas than blasting away before the birds are in range. That's why duck blind decorum dictates that you don't pull the trigger until the lead duck caller says "Shoot 'em"—or "Cut 'em" if you're a disciple of *Duck Dynasty*.

Country rapper Colt Ford put an

interesting twist on those shooting sentiments when he penned "Cut 'Em All" for his recent album, *Thanks for Listening*. For the song and video, Colt enlisted the help of his friend Willie Robertson, CEO of the multimillion-dollar enterprise Duck Commander and one of the stars of A&E's reality series *Duck Dynasty*. Willie hasn't quit his day job just yet, but he did drop some rhymes for the song and co-star in the video, which pairs Colt and Willie as two police detectives in search of a renegade duck, Diggs, who was brought to life in the form of a

three-foot, deranged-looking puppet.

"I always have something fun around hunting on my records, and this track had a duck call in it and I thought it would be cool to include Willie," says Colt. "We have been friends for years, and I called him and said, 'Dude, I think I have something that's cool,' and sent it to him, and he was like, 'Aw, man, I love it.' So he rapped for the song, and he sounds cool because he sounds like him. I tried to write it thinking like him, so it would make sense to him and would be a good





(Above) Puppeteers bring the outlaw duck, Diggs, to life; (below) a seedy motel balcony gets the CSI treatment; (below right) Diggs leaves his mark on the car windshield.



Colt (right) and Willie get to the scene of the crime; (below left) their custom license plate says it all; (below right) Diggs drops a feathery clue.



representation of who he was.”

It's not often you need a puppet master on a country music video set, but that's exactly who was required to anthropomorphize Diggs for the shoot. Throughout the video, Colt and Willie are hot on the trail of the outlaw duck that is wreaking havoc in a small-town community. Colt and Willie collect evidence and question witnesses in a search that eventually takes them from a seedy motel to the backwoods. But after Diggs once again eludes them, it's up to master duck caller Willie to use the tool of

his real-life craft—a Duck Commander duck call—to bring Diggs in.

“At [label] Average Joes, we're constantly pushing the envelope and doing cool new creative things, and this video was certainly fun to do,” says Colt. “I thought it turned out great. Willie was fantastic. With all he has going on and how busy he is, it's humbling to me for someone to take their time and be part of something I'm doing. He doesn't have a whole lot of free days, so to come over and shoot from daylight to dark on his free day says a lot about him as a friend.”

Now that Colt and Willie have taken Diggs into custody, does that mean we've seen the last of the trouble-making quacker?

“You never know if we've seen the last of Diggs,” says Colt. “There's no telling what he'll get into, but I'll say this much: there's a lot that goes into that puppet. You don't just stick your hand up the puppet's butt, that's not how it works. There are all these sticks and facial movements going on. It's impressive to watch him go. I wouldn't be surprised if he showed up again.” **JIM CASEY**



# COUNTRY TO THE CORE

DARYLE SINGLETARY LETS HIS TRADITIONAL  
FLAG FLY ON HIS NEW ALBUM,  
*THERE'S STILL A LITTLE COUNTRY LEFT.*

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN



Daryle Singletary isn't exactly what you'd call "prolific." Up until the present time, he had not released an album since 2009. The Georgia-born singer writes songs, but not at the breakneck pace that the pros on Music Row churn them out. And you'd have to rewind to the previous century to find Daryle's last Top 30 single.

Yet, the 44-year-old maintains a fan base that's practically canine in its unyielding loyalty. That's because Daryle chooses to be true to his first love, traditional hard-core country music, with the same strict allegiance. He's never attempted any leaps into pop country, bro-country or any other sort of country offshoot.

Not that any of that would have worked. Daryle is simply too country to the core, speaking with a slow, deliberate Georgia brogue (where "can't" always comes out "cain't") and a laid-back tone with which he occasionally peppers in a witticism that can slide right by you if you're not paying attention. He grew up on country and gospel music, soaking up the sounds of Conway Twitty (to whom he's sometimes compared), Randy Travis and other traditionalists. So, he couldn't fool anyone if he tried.

"I think my fans would see right through it if I tried to be something else," Daryle says with a hearty chuckle. "I have been around for 20 years and I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that I haven't changed."

Further proof of that stance comes through on Daryle's new album, *There's Still a Little Country Left*, in release now. The songs on the collection are as straightforward as the title, with three tunes in particular that lament the dearth of traditional country on the radio: the title tune, "Too Late to Save the World" and the up-front "Get Out of My Country." It's Daryle's first full-fledged album since 2009's *Rockin' in the Country*.

Daryle hasn't quite been idle in the interim. It's just that real life took priority over writing and recording, at least for a while. "My twins [boys Mercer and Jonah] were born in October 2010, when I was working on another record," Daryle explains. "We spent the first six months in the house with them and not going anywhere. When the doctor finally released us," he adds with a dry laugh, "to get out a little bit, I took a few days and sat down with [songwriters] Jimmy Ritchey and Don Poythress and we started writing some."

The first collaboration among the three resulted in a tune that could stand as Daryle's biography. "They were like, you know, I've got twins and I've gone from it being just me and my wife to having not one but two babies. We wrote a song about how things were so much different in such a short time." The track, "So Much Different Than Before," appears on *There's Still a Little Country Left*.



Daryle gives a live Nashville performance in 2014.



It must be duly noted that home life has grown only busier since the twin sons arrived. Daryle and wife Holly have welcomed two more children to the nest, daughters Nora and baby Charlotte, born this past September, meaning that the couple now tends to four children under the age of 5, yet they are amazingly calm.

Three tunes on Daryle's new album are likely to draw the lion's share of attention, as they unabashedly declare an undying love for traditional country. And while not calling out any artists in particular, they do take a few well-timed swats at the current state of country music.

The title track fairly well sums up Daryle's stance on the whole matter. Preston Brust of the duo LOCASH had the main idea and the lyrics and suggested it to Daryle at a writing session between the two. "It's everything that I want to say to my fans," Daryle says. "I wanted to tell my fans that I'm not going anywhere and there is still a little country left out there. The song talks about sweet tea and barbershop poles in small towns. When I got the song, I thought, 'This says it all.' I'm still doing it like I did in 1995."

That was the year Daryle finally made good on his ultimate goal—seeing his name on an actual country record. He had moved to Nashville five years earlier, with





When he's not making music, Daryle loves to ride and rope; (below) making an impression in 2001 outside the now-closed Music Valley Wax Museum near the Opryland Hotel; (below left) celebrating 1995's "I Let Her Lie" with his label team and supporter Randy Travis (left).



**"I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH ANY OF THE NEW MUSIC. I'M JUST SAYING THAT IT'S NOT THE MUSIC THAT I GREW UP LISTENING TO. AND I DON'T THINK THAT THE PEOPLE WHO LIKE MY MUSIC ARE FANS OF IT."**

the blessing of his dad, before he'd even reached the age of 20. On his self-titled debut album in 1995, the first single, "I'm Living Up to Her Low Expectations," barely cracked the Top 40. The follow-up, "I Let Her Lie," fared much better, peaking at the No. 2 spot and establishing Daryle as a solid, authentic country voice.

Most industry insiders will share that it takes anywhere from five to 10 years to get yourself established in Music City. Daryle remembers those early days with a mixture of fondness, humor and a "can't believe I lived through it" tone.

"I lived over the Randy Travis gift shop [off Nashville's Music Row] for a few years," Daryle recalls. "I think sometimes we'd eat breakfast, lunch and dinner at the Shoney's that was right nearby." During that particular

era, Music Row was a hodgepodge of tacky star museums and what you might refer to as classic tourist traps, with the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (now relocated) thrown in to give the area some sense of legitimacy. Now it's a gentrified space with condos, trendy restaurants and upscale hotels, and longtime locals are hard-pressed to decide which is actually worse.

"I have seen the landscape change," Daryle says, somewhat wistfully. "It's crazy. I don't really get into the Music Row area that much, but I have noticed that they are tearing down some of the old buildings. One of the first things to go was the Hank Williams Museum, actually the house that he lived in when he was in Nashville. I think about that [Lacy J. Dalton] song, '16th Avenue,' about the songwriters on Music



## THE PAYCHECK SESSION

**DARYLE SINGLETARY** does a duet with **JOHNNY PAYCHECK** through the magic of technology.

The final track on Daryle Singletary's latest album, *There's Still a Little Country Left*, features a duet between Daryle and country legend Johnny Paycheck on Johnny's 1977 hit "I'm the Only Hell (Mama Ever Raised)." The two were never in the same studio at the same time, but through the miracle of technology, they were able to collaborate. Daryle fills in the rest of the story.

"Johnny, around 1992, went in and recorded 10 or 11 new versions of his hits with his band," Daryle begins. "Nobody's ever heard these songs. They were never released. Johnny's manager Dan Mitchell was going through some old stuff and found them. We got the rights to this song and we cut my vocal and edited that into Johnny's track. It was pretty raw when we got it, but it turned out great."

Daryle, a country traditionalist if ever one existed, shares that he's always wanted to record a tribute album to Johnny, who died in 2003. "That has never come to pass," Daryle says softly. "But it's great that we could do this. I think it's one of the neatest things on the record."



(Clockwise from top) Performing on *Country's Family Reunion*; Daryle's kids, (from left) Jonah, Nora, Mercer and Charlotte Rose (seated); working on the new album in the studio



Row, and the new people don't even know what that is. There's hardly anybody on 16th Avenue anymore."

That eats a little at the strict traditionalist in Daryle. On the other hand, he's pleased to be able to continue making music in the face of an industry that appears to be changing all too rapidly.

"I came here 25 years ago and have been blessed to do what I do and make a living at it," Daryle says. "That's all I've wanted to do. I haven't had a hit in more than 15 years, and when I think about that, I realize how fortunate I am." Indeed, Daryle's last bona fide hit came with 1997's "The Note," which peaked just inside the Top 30. But he's never lost his fan base, and he doesn't figure to lose it now, especially as this new album reaches stores and online retailers.

"My fans are the people that may not be real fond of the music that's going on today," he says with just a touch of sly sarcasm. "Those are the ones I'm shooting for." He is quick to add that he's not necessarily knocking today's younger artists or their particular legions.

"I get asked that all the time," Daryle acknowledged.

es. "But I don't have a problem with anyone, man. I can applaud anyone who can make it in this business, because it's tough. My only issue is that we can't forget the people who came here first and allowed us to do what we're doing."

Certainly, there's no hint of mean-spirited attitude in the songs from *There's Still Some Country Left*. "They don't attack anyone," Daryle declares. "If you have an ill spirit about something, it just comes off as being jealous. So, I don't have a problem with any of the new music. I'm just saying that it's not the music that I grew up listening to. And I don't think that the people who like my music are fans of it." His lone lament, as he states, is "being a traditional singer in a world that's kind of gotten away from it."

But there are no regrets for maintaining his traditional stance. "You can't chase what's popular," Daryle says, echoing the advice that industry experts have handed down for decades. "That's the approach I've always taken. If I tried to change, it would compromise my integrity. And I'm just not that guy." No, indeed. **NCW**







# DALE WATSON

At some point, singer/songwriter Dale Watson decided to stop fighting what was going on in mainstream country music. Instead, he created his own genre based on the tried-and-true style of roots music he's been perfecting for 20 years.

"When all you do is complain and not offer a solution, you're not helping," says the Texas-based artist, a frequently outspoken critic of mainstream country music whose new album, *Call Me Insane*, arrived in June. "So I started the Ameripolitan Awards show and kicked off the genre. It's accentuating the positive side of music instead of always complaining about what I don't like."

By Dale's definition, Ameripolitan encompasses four distinct variations on country and roots: honky-tonk, Western swing, rockabilly and outlaw country. *Call Me Insane* (which Texas mainstay Lloyd Maines produced) has touches of all four, from the state-ly, ruminative title track to the livelier, danceable "Bug Ya for Love." Much of the album (and Ameripolitan music, by extension) seems geared toward the

social experience of hearing it in a live setting, with beer bottles clinking and boots beating on a hardwood floor.

"You go into an Ameripolitan room, it's like, hey, get your cellphone out, call somebody, raise hell, yell out what you're liking, and just have fun," Dale explains. "If you want to talk to somebody, go to the back of the room and talk to them. It's just having fun with music. It's supposed to be a social thing."

One of *Call Me Insane*'s standout tracks, "Jonesin' for Jones," actually had its genesis in that exact setting. Back in 2013, Dale was mourning the loss of George Jones and played a show in Austin shortly after the news came out.

"I was doing my residency at the Continental Club on a Monday night. I said, 'Man, I'm sure I'm like everybody this week, I'm jonesin for Jones,'" he says. "I thought, hey, that's a good song title, so I just had my bass player go into a 'White Lightning' bass lick and we did the song onstage. I had our drummer record it on his iPhone and he sent it to me and we finally figured out how to

make it a real song."

That spontaneous, unpredictable component is a hallmark of Dale's shows. He doesn't keep a set list and obliges fans' requests for songs from his back catalog. It was a sort of response to seeing some of his heroes not being able to honor requests and tossing off quick medleys of their beloved hits.

"I understand that. [They have] got so many hits, they haven't got enough time in their show to do it," he says. "But for me, it's not like I've got hit song after hit song, so I encourage people to holler out songs they really came

to hear. They spent the money, and if they want to hear it live, I'd like to do it for them."

Which is not to say that every show is perfect, either. The band plays five days a week, but with a vast discography that stretches back 20 years, Dale admits that it's nearly impossible to remember them all.

"Just as many times we crash and burn, and go, oh we need to go back and listen to that," he says. "But that's the fun of music. I enjoy that challenge of trying to keep up with myself and my past."

Dale is also looking to the future by diversifying. He's taken to producing up-and-coming artists who fit in the Ameripolitan mold, and he's become the proprietor of two Texas bars, Little Longhorn Saloon in Austin and the Big T Roadhouse in St. Hedwig. When he isn't onstage with his band or on the road, Dale can often be found slinging suds behind one of those bars.

"If the bartender can't come in, and I need to go down there, or if I've got a night off, I'll just go down there and bartend. You get a lot of great stories from listening to people. It ain't like I'm mixing drinks, don't worry. I ain't got to know how to do a martini or whatever," he says, laughing. "I'm just popping open a beer."

**JON FREEMAN**



**FOR FANS OF:  
GEORGE JONES,  
ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL,  
HANK WILLIAMS**

**ESSENTIAL  
LISTENING:**

**"BUG YA FOR LOVE"**

**"A DAY AT A TIME"**

**"JONESIN' FOR JONES"**

**"HEAVEN'S GONNA  
HAVE A HONKY TONK"**



*BEHIND THE SONG*





# EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Singer/songwriter Niko Moon was counting the days until he would walk down the aisle with his fiancée, Anna. To keep himself occupied, he was spending time on the road and making music with the Zac Brown Band. While on a West Coast run in California several months back, Niko was reflecting on his life with his beautiful bride-to-be and some of the greatest joys that she brings on a daily basis.

It just so happened that “Big Al” Anderson (Tim McGraw’s “The Cowboy in Me”) was also invited on the road during that time, allowing Niko and the hit songwriter some one-on-one time during the day to dig into some ideas.

“We were coming up with some cool ideas,” Niko recalls. “We thought, what if we wrote a love song, but it being more about your woman in the sense of her in her natural state—not the way Hollywood or a magazine gives you the vision of a woman being ‘beautiful,’ but more of how a man sees his woman in his day-to-day life? That is what is really beautiful about a woman, and it’s what you find beautiful about the person that you’re in love with.”

Later that afternoon, when Zac finally found some downtime, Niko and Al tossed out their new song idea to see if it was anything Zac would be interested in diving into with them. As Niko expected, Zac loved the idea, seeing how he had his own wife, Shelly, to use as his muse.

“We kind of had in our minds our little bits of what it was that made our women beauti-

ful to us,” explains Niko. “When you’re home and it’s just the two of you, what are those little everyday moments? Like when you wake up in the morning, how do they look? They’re not super-done-up and dressed all super-nice. They might even be wearing one

of your sweatshirts and their hair’s all messed up and they don’t have any makeup on. That’s beautiful because that’s who they are.”

After crafting a very personal first verse to their song, the writers decided to continue the lyrics to progress throughout a typical day with the women in their lives. “It’s a day that you’re spending with your woman,” notes Niko. “We just went through an entire day of just kind of appreciating a woman who is naturally beautiful. We agreed that there’s not a lot of songs like that, so we wanted something that was real.”

By the time they finished “Loving You Easy,”

Zac knew the tune would be one of the tracks on the band’s forthcoming *Jekyll + Hyde* album. It eventually was released as the album’s third single, quickly marking another successful hit for the Zac Brown Band. It also marked back-to-back singles for Niko, who was also a co-writer on the band’s previous chart-topping hit “Homegrown.”

“Writing this song was just so much fun,” Niko says, smiling. “I’m super-proud of how it came out, and I know the other guys are, too. We’re really glad that it’s connecting with people.” **ALANNA CONAWAY**

## “LOVING YOU EASY”

**ZAC BROWN BAND**

**WRITERS:** Zac Brown,  
Al Anderson, Niko Moon



## “BIG” STRING OF HITS

**“BIG AL” ANDERSON’s** songwriting success has been happening since the 1990s. He’s scored singles with the likes of Carlene Carter, Vince Gill, Diamond Rio and Trisha Yearwood, and co-wrote Tim McGraw’s No. 1 “The Cowboy in Me.” Before that, he was the guitarist in the eclectic, beloved ’60s/’70s band NRBQ.





The week of August 8, 2015

## TOP 25 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	—	<b>SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE</b> JASON ISBELL
2	—	<b>ANGELS AND ALCOHOL</b> ALAN JACKSON
3	1	<b>MONTEVALLO</b> SAM HUNT
4	2	<b>JEKYLL + HYDE</b> ZAC BROWN BAND
5	5	<b>THE OUTSIDERS</b> ERIC CHURCH
6	4	<b>PAIN KILLER</b> LITTLE BIG TOWN
7	3	<b>PAGEANT MATERIAL</b> KACEY MUSGRAVES
8	6	<b>NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL COUNTRY, VOLUME 8</b> • VARIOUS ARTISTS
9	9	<b>OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT</b> JASON ALDEAN
10	7	<b>JUST AS I AM</b> BRANTLEY GILBERT
11	10	<b>ANYTHING GOES</b> FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
12	8	<b>DJANGO AND JIMMIE</b> WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
13	—	<b>BLACKED OUT</b> MOONSHINE BANDITS
14	13	<b>CRASH MY PARTY</b> LUKE BRYAN
15	11	<b>ABOUT TO GET REAL</b> EASTON CORBIN
16	14	<b>IGNITE THE NIGHT</b> CHASE RICE
17	12	<b>SPRING BREAK ... CHECKIN' OUT</b> LUKE BRYAN
18	—	<b>MIXTAPE: 'TIL SUMMER'S GONE</b> LEE BRICE
19	17	<b>THE BIG REVIVAL</b> KENNY CHESNEY
20	22	<b>COLE SWINDELL</b> COLE SWINDELL
21	15	<b>GREATEST HITS: DECADE #1</b> CARRIE UNDERWOOD
22	21	<b>GREATEST HITS SO FAR ...</b> ZAC BROWN BAND
23	16	<b>BRINGING BACK THE SUNSHINE</b> BLAKE SHELTON
24	24	<b>35 BIGGEST HITS</b> TIM MCGRAW
25	30	<b>PLATINUM</b> MIRANDA LAMBERT

## TOP 25 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	2	<b>ONE HELL OF AN AMEN</b> BRANTLEY GILBERT
2	1	<b>TONIGHT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU</b> JASON ALDEAN
3	4	<b>KISS YOU IN THE MORNING</b> MICHAEL RAY
4	6	<b>KICK THE DUST UP</b> LUKE BRYAN
5	9	<b>LOVING YOU EASY</b> ZAC BROWN BAND
6	8	<b>YOUNG &amp; CRAZY</b> FRANKIE BALLARD
7	12	<b>HELL OF A NIGHT</b> DUSTIN LYNCH
8	11	<b>HOUSE PARTY</b> SAM HUNT
9	10	<b>CRUSHIN' IT</b> BRAD PAISLEY
10	5	<b>LOVE YOU LIKE THAT</b> CANAN SMITH
11	13	<b>HOUSE PARTY</b> SAM HUNT
12	15	<b>BUY ME A BOAT</b> CHRIS JANSON
13	17	<b>JOHN COUGAR, JOHN DEERE, JOHN 3:16</b> • KEITH URBAN
14	16	<b>LOSE MY MIND</b> BRETT ELDRIDGE
15	14	<b>LIKE A WRECKING BALL</b> ERIC CHURCH
16	19	<b>FLY</b> MADDIE & TAE
17	23	<b>SAVE IT FOR A RAINY DAY</b> KENNY CHESNEY
18	20	<b>REAL LIFE</b> JAKE OWEN
19	18	<b>GONNA WANNA TONIGHT</b> CHASE RICE
20	22	<b>I'M TO BLAME</b> KIP MOORE
21	21	<b>LET ME SEE YA GIRL</b> COLE SWINDELL
22	27	<b>ANYTHING GOES</b> FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
23	24	<b>BREAK UP WITH HIM</b> OLD DOMINION
24	26	<b>LONG STRETCH OF LOVE</b> LADY ANTEBELLUM
25	25	<b>NOTHIN' LIKE YOU</b> DAN + SHAY

## TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	<b>SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE</b> JASON ISBELL
2	2	<b>THE TRAVELING KIND</b> EMMYLOU HARRIS & RODNEY CROWELL
3	4	<b>STILL</b> RICHARD THOMPSON
4	3	<b>DJANGO AND JIMMIE</b> WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
5	5	<b>PAGEANT MATERIAL</b> KACEY MUSGRAVES
6	6	<b>TRAVELLER</b> CHRIS STAPLETON
7	12	<b>CALL ME INSANE</b> DALE WATSON
8	7	<b>THE RUFFIAN'S MISFORTUNE</b> RAY WYLIE HUBBARD
9	10	<b>BOUND BY THE BLUES</b> SONNY LANDRETH
10	15	<b>LARRY CAMPBELL &amp; TERESA WILLIAMS</b> LARRY CAMPBELL & TERESA WILLIAMS

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART

## rdio TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY SONGS\*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	<b>IF IT TAKES A LIFETIME</b> JASON ISBELL
2	<b>WHAT DO YOU WANT</b> JERROD NIEMANN
3	<b>TAKE YOUR TIME</b> SAM HUNT
4	<b>LIKE A WRECKING BALL</b> ERIC CHURCH
5	<b>STRIP IT DOWN</b> LUKE BRYAN

## TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY/AMERICANA/SOUTHERN ALBUMS\*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	<b>SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE</b> JASON ISBELL
2	<b>JUDGE JERROD AND THE HUNG JURY</b> JERROD NIEMANN
3	<b>THE BLADE</b> ASHLEY MONROE
4	<b>ANGELS AND ALCOHOL</b> ALAN JACKSON
5	<b>BRINGING BACK THE SUNSHINE</b> BLAKE SHELTON

\*DATA FROM JULY 27, 2015

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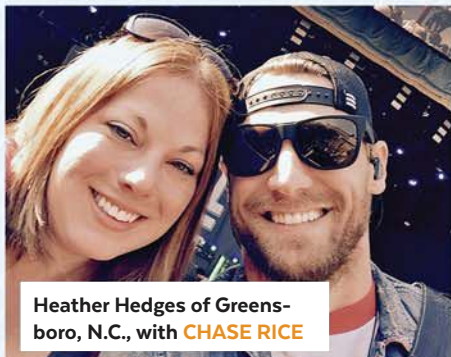
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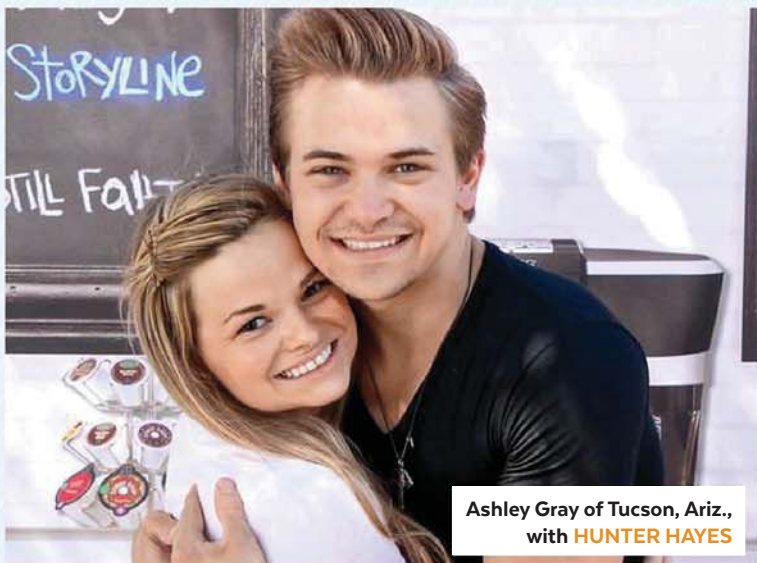




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Becca Miller of Wayne, Mich., with **MICHAEL RAY**



Ashley Gray of Tucson, Ariz., with **HUNTER HAYES**



**SAM HUNT** with Breanne Snell of Perry, Mich.



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# WORDSEARCH

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## ZAC BROWN BAND

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T W W K R G R A M M Y S K N A M I Q Z U  
H P U H P O Z X Y F A A E A E T B F D P  
E V I G U O Y T A H W T E G U O Y M I M  
R P M H C D H C S H A N P N O P S R N E  
N E G L P B C L E O G A M A Y V I E I I  
G E R T C Y H A L M N L E M G O T H T N  
R D O S H E I Y W E I T I T N C I T R N  
O E H I R I C C O G K A N T I A R A A A  
U E L T I N K O B R L S M A V L E E M T  
N N S R S H E O Y O A K I M O E V W E E  
D K E A F E N K O W W O N R L V E R D E  
E Z S W R R F L C N S S D E D E T E Y W  
G A S E Y E R S O L E D L E I N A D M S  
A M I N A Y I L N O H U R R Y T H L M N  
C I O A R E E H T P S B K F T K W O I L  
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GRAMMYS  
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JIMMY DE MARTINI  
JOHN DRISKELL HOPKINS  
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KNEE DEEP  
LOVING YOU EASY  
MATT MANGANO

NO HURRY  
SOUTHERN  
GROUND  
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GIVE  
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**JON FREEMAN** has been an editor at *Nash Country Weekly* since 2012 and occasionally writes about pop music for local weekly the *Nashville Scene*. In his spare time he enjoys long-distance running, playing with his dog and rearranging the furniture.

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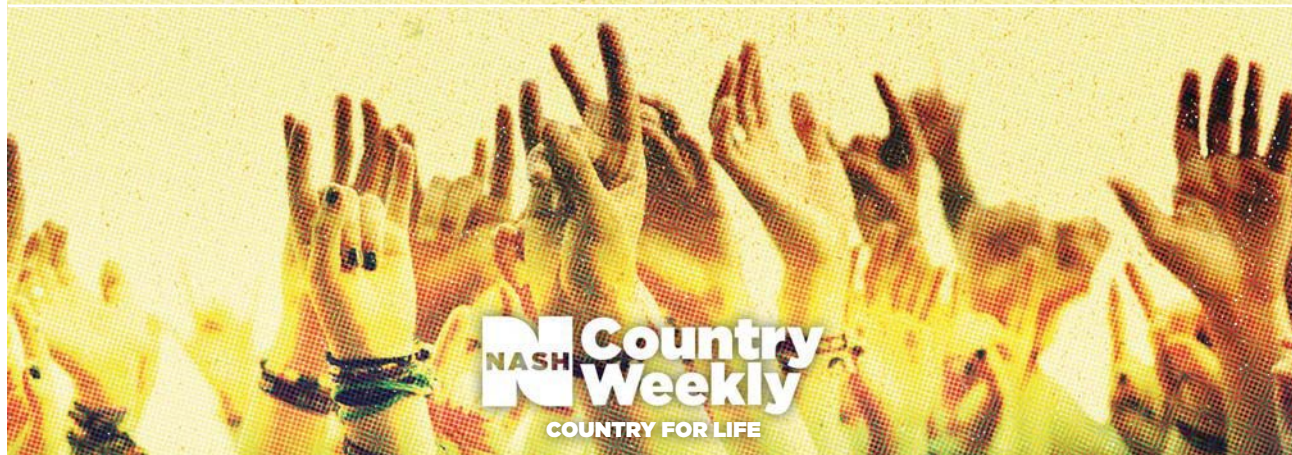


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This impressive masterwork of handcrafting and hand-painting shimmers with light, from the warm glow of the lights inside "Graceland™," to the illuminated "Christmas Star" at the top of the tree. Your complete "Happy Holidays from Graceland™" Christmas Tree Collection includes silvery Elvis® "45s" ornaments, and the grounds of Graceland™, decorated in fine holiday fashion with Elvis® himself on hand to greet you. What's more, "Graceland™," your first shipment, even plays a music box rendition of "Blue Christmas" in honor of the 50th anniversary of the release of the platinum record-honored single.

***A superb value that's not available  
in any store. Act now!***

Shipment One, "Graceland™," can be yours at the attractive \$59.98 issue price, payable in three convenient installments of just \$19.99, the first billed before shipment. Subsequent issues—each billed separately at the same attractive issue price—include your 3 ft. pre-lit "Blue Christmas" tree, additional sculptures, Elvis® "45s" ornaments, and the FREE snowy white tree skirt with blue trim included with Shipment Three—OUR gift to you! With our best-in-the-business, 365-day guarantee, your satisfaction is assured and you may cancel at any time. Strong demand is expected. Send no money now. Just complete and mail the Reservation Application today!



Shown smaller than actual size.  
Tree measures approx. 3 ft. tall.

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[www.bradfordexchange.com/ElvisTree](http://www.bradfordexchange.com/ElvisTree)

## RESERVATION APPLICATION

## PLEASE RESPOND PROMPTLY

THE  
BRADFORD EXCHANGE

HAWTHORNE VILLAGE DIVISION

9210 Maryland Street · Niles, IL 60714-1322

**YES.** Please reserve the "Happy Holidays from Graceland™" Christmas Tree Collection for me as described in this announcement.

**SEND NO MONEY NOW**

Mrs. Mr. Ms.

Name (Please Print Clearly)

Address

City

State

Zip

E-Mail

**917790-E08103**

\*Plus \$9.99 shipping and service. All sales subject to acceptance and product availability. Please allow 4-6 weeks for shipment after initial payment.





"A goal of mine [is] to sit down and write a song that's just me, 100 percent, one day. I think that would be a neat thing to do. I've always marveled at your Vince Gills and Ronnie Duns. I think Alan [Jackson] wrote 'Drive' by himself, which I've always thought is just a masterpiece of a song. I've always really had a lot of respect for them that they could sit down and write one by themselves like that."

**LUKE BRYAN**



## 9 TO 5 DOLLY PARTON FACTS

**9** CMA AWARDS

**8** GRAMMYS

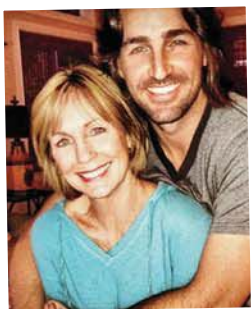
**7** ACM AWARDS

**6** BILLBOARD  
NO. 1 ALBUMS

**5** GOLDEN GLOBE  
NOMINATIONS

*"My mom and dad, back in the day, they were enamored with the fact that I got a record deal and tour buses and was doing all this, and I told my mom, 'I know this sounds whatever, but everybody poops.'"*

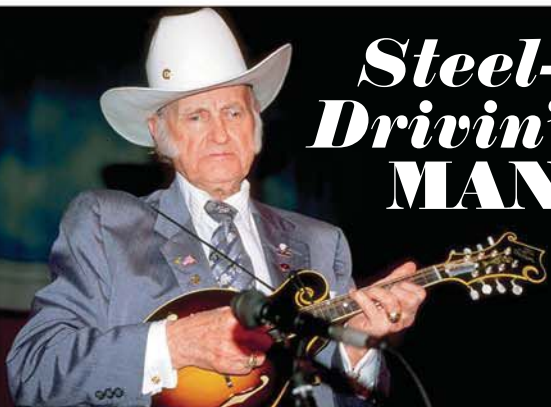
**JAKE OWEN**



**"I LEARNED SO MUCH FROM GOING ON TOUR WITH SAM [HUNT]. HE'S A NATURAL AT MAKING EVERYONE FEEL IMPORTANT. HE KNOWS HOW TO CONNECT WITH FANS, AND THAT'S SOMETHING NOT A WHOLE LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO DO."**

**Michael Ray**

## Steel- Drivin' MAN

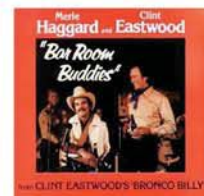


A **"steel driver"** was a worker who hammered a steel drill bit into rock to make holes for blasting charges in railroad tunnel construction. The most famous steel-driving man was the folkloric **JOHN HENRY**, who outworked a steam-powered hammer in a contest before dying from exhaustion. Many country artists have recorded ballads about John Henry, including **BILL MONROE**, **JOHNNY CASH**, **JERRY REED** and **DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS**.

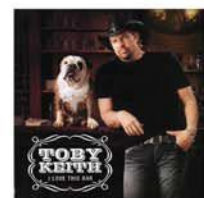
# BAR FLIES



**TYLER FARR** went to the top of the country charts in May with "A Guy Walks Into a Bar," but he's not the only artist to hit No. 1 thanks to the intoxicating effects of a bar. Check out these three bar-hopping toppers.



**"BAR ROOM BUDDIES"**  
Merle Haggard and Clint Eastwood  
1980



**"I LOVE THIS BAR"**  
Toby Keith  
2003



**"BARTENDER"**  
Lady Antebellum  
2014



# DEBUT ALBUM

FEATURING THE HIT

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**MICHAEL  
RAY**

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